A TOUR
IN
ICELAND.

LONDON

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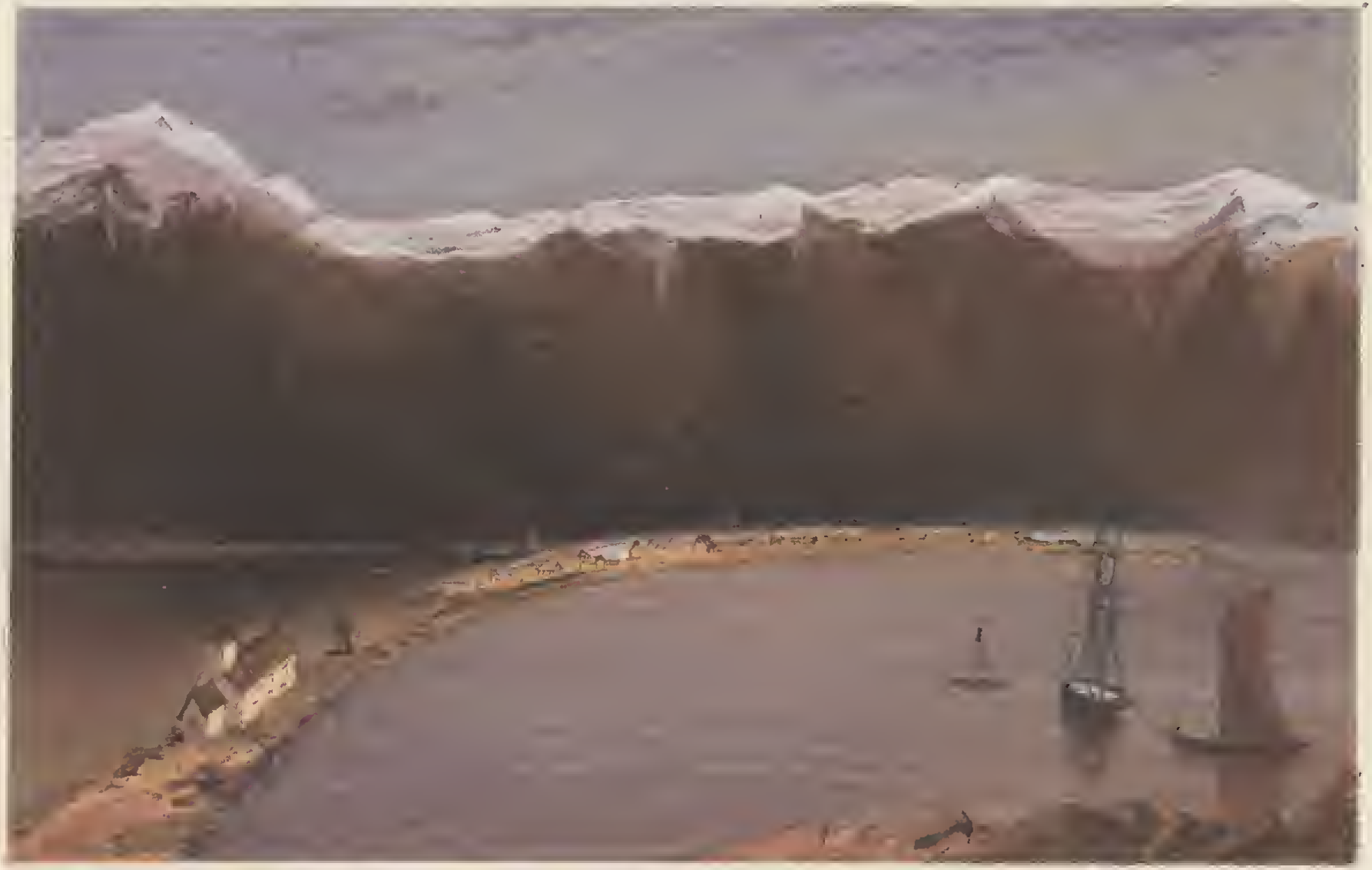

THE NORTH-WEST PENINSULA

OF

ICELAND:

BEING THE JOURNAL OF A TOUR IN ICELAND IN THE SPRING AND SUMMER OF 1862.

BY

C. W. SHEPHERD, M.A., F.Z.S.

> And they who'd the charge of them wrote in the logs,
> "Wind NE.—blows a hurricane—rains cats and dogs."
>
> INGOLDSBY LEGENDS.

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PREFACE.

MY PRINCIPAL OBJECT in making a second journey to Iceland, which country I first visited in company with Mr. Holland in 1861, was to explore the North-West Peninsula and the Vatna Jökull. I believe that the exploration of the first of these districts had never been attempted by any traveller previous to the journey of which a brief account is given in this volume, nor had that of the second until Mr. Holland and I made an attempt to ascend the Öræfa Jökull. Although I was unable fully to accomplish my purposes, I still believe, notwithstanding my comparative failure' that Icelandic travellers, and perhaps others will be interested in perusing an account of a

part of Iceland which has not yet been described.

I may observe that on my way to and from the Peninsula, I passed through districts already more or less known: some of these I have not at all or only slightly noticed, confining myself to giving here and there an account of Icelandic life and scenery which, I trust, will be considered either new or not uninteresting.

My other object in visiting Iceland was to settle, if possible, some vexed questions in Ornithology; and there will consequently be found in these pages some information relative to the habits and habitats of the birds of the island.

Iceland is a very peculiar country, and is deserving of more attention than it has hitherto received. Its mountain districts are almost totally unexplored, and I believe I am correct in stating that in late years, with the exception of Hecla and Eyrícs Jökull, no mountain of any magnitude has been satisfactorily climbed. There

are also many unexplored regions and many fjörðrs yet unvisited.

The Great Vatna Jökull still remains the unsolved problem of Iceland.

The ornithologist should visit Iceland in the spring, and endure with what patience he can the storms of that season. The tourist will do well to delay his visit till the summer, as the weather is charming from the middle of July to the middle of September.

The plates are taken from sketches drawn on the spot by my friend Mr. G. G. Fowler, who has kindly lent them to me for that purpose.

C.W. S.

TROTTERSCLIFFE: *February* 1, 1867.

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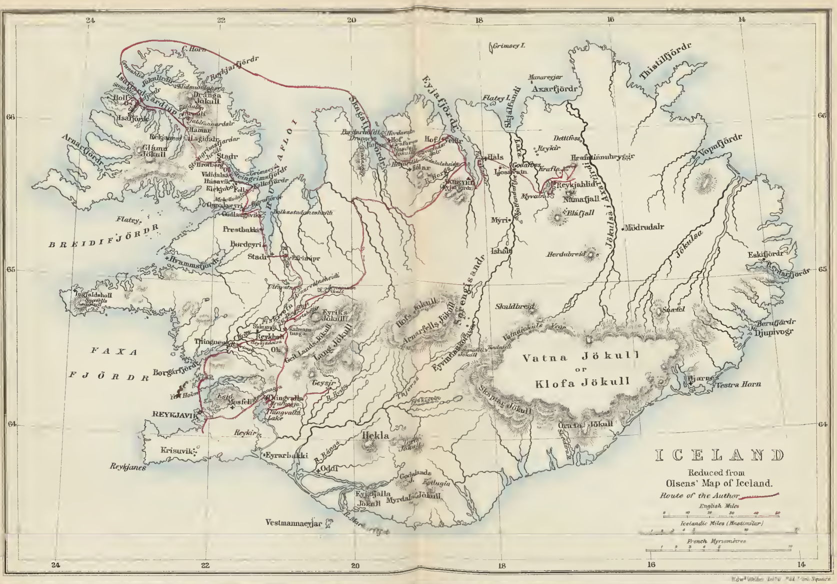

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THE

NORTH-WEST PENINSULA

OF

ICELAND.

CHAPTER I.

REYKJA-VÍK TO REYKHOLT.

Faroe Islands—Reykja-vík—Too early arrival—Otho Gislason—Borgar-fjörðr—Thingnes—A farm-house—Food—Reykholt—Sunday—Stormy weather—Icelandic spring.

On the 20th of April, 1862, I left England for Iceland on board the *Arcturus*, in the company of my friends Mr. H. M. Upcher, of Sheringham Hall, Norfolk, and Mr. G. G. Fowler, of Gunton Hall, Suffolk. This was two months earlier than we had intended to set out, but we had certain ornithological inquiries in view, which required our earliest presence in that country.

A pleasant run, with a stiff breeze, brought us to

the Faroe Islands on the 23rd, and we entered the harbour of Thorshaven, firing an occasional blunderbuss in honour of the new Governor, who was a fellow-passenger. As we were allowed a day to see what we could of the islands, we started immediately on our landing, and, taking the only road out of the town, clambered the hills on our left hand. Some of the views were very fine, especially that of the island and mountain of Koltar; and a fortnight, I think, could be very well spent in that mountainous little group.

On the 24th we again weighed anchor: on the 25th we caught sight of the snow-peaks of the Vatna Jökull, and on the 27th we anchored in the bay of Reykja-vík, the capital of Iceland.

Our first look at the land was not cheering. The morning was dark and gloomy, and every now and then a sickly sun made its appearance between heavy showers of sleet and snow, hurried along by a strong north-east wind. Everything was covered or patched with snow. Here and there a few of the inhabitants were busied with their boats, preparing to unload the steamer; but all who were not obliged to be out of doors kept inside, and the little town seemed almost deserted. On Monday the 28th we landed and took

up our abode at the 'Club House,' as the hotel is called.

Our time was fully occupied throughout the week partly in making preparations for our journey inland, and partly in venturing on some shooting expeditions to the Laxà (Salmon river) about five miles distant from Reykja-vík. Ptarmigan, mergansers, goosanders, with many sorts of ducks and gulls, fell a prey to our guns. We fished also in the river and caught a great many trout, but the season was too early for salmon.

One night, two of us who had suffered the shades of evening to deepen over us before we relinquished that absorbing sport were overtaken in a snow storm. It was not quite dark, sufficient light remaining to enable the snow to bewilder us with its great whirling flakes; all traces of the road (for there is a road to the Laxà) were soon lost, and if it had not been for the size of the stones which line it—(roads are made in Iceland by taking stones off and not by putting stones on)—and which in a great measure prevented us from ignorantly straying from the track, we should probably have spent a very unpleasant night. As it was, by patiently trudging on and by stedfastly refusing to believe that we had missed the way, we, after a time, saw, cast across our path, a feeble ray

of light, in which the great flakes danced about like motes in a sunbeam. It came from a cottage window. We could just trace the outline of the snow-covered house with its one chimney, one window, and doorway, and it brought forcibly to mind the winter pictures that we see of the 'good old Christmas time' in England. We were more than two hours and a-half in traversing that dreary waste between the Laxà and Reykja-vík.

On reaching the Club House we found our companion in his shirt-sleeves engaged in warm controversy with a young gentleman from the University. This young man had taken our castle by storm with the laudable intention of offering himself a victim on the altar of theological examination. He had come, he said, to be examined in Theology by Professors from the learned University of Oxford. We acknowledged the compliment with all the dignity that we could impart to corduroy knicker-bockers and fisherman's jerseys and sou'-westers, but suggested to him the extreme lateness of the hour, it being midnight, and holding out to him a hope that we would consider his request on the morrow, we quietly, although with difficulty, dismissed him from our presence.

We paid visits also to several old friends of mine, who very kindly gave us every assistance in their power. All, however, were of the same opinion; and that was, that we had come too early in the year to travel in the interior. Ponies—at least such as could carry us—were not to be had for money; and if we could have bought any, there was no grass for them to live upon, and hay we could not carry with us. The roads, too, were nearly all blocked up with snow, or else so destroyed by the partial thaw as to render them quite impassable. In fact, the whole surface of the country was so saturated with snow-water, unable to get away through the still frozen earth, that it resembled a vast bog more than anything else. Guides, too, were not procurable; the fishermen, who usually turn their summer leisure to account by following that occupation, being still absent at sea with their boats. All these unexpected impediments altered our plans.

Otho Gislason, a 'candidat' at the Theological College, at Reykja-vík, whose acquaintance I had made during my former visit to Iceland, offered to come with us, until my former guide, Olavur Steingrímson, could leave his fishing; and he very kindly started at once to a little farm, named Ytri-Hólmr, on the

opposite side of the bay, with the view of collecting as many ponies as possible to convey us to the head of the Borgar-fjörðr, where we intended to pitch our tent and amuse ourselves, by fishing and shooting, till travelling should become practicable. Gislason left Reykja-vík on Friday; we followed on the Monday, Olavur taking us across the bay to Ytri-Hólmr in his fishing-boat. On our arrival there, we were glad to find that Gislason had been successful. He had collected twelve ponies. These we took with us; and keeping on the sea-shore, we proceeded to the Borgar-fjörðr, where we arrived on the 7th of May, and took up our head-quarters at the farm of Thíngnes.

Icelandic farm-houses are invariably embedded in walls of turf from two to four feet, or even more, in thickness, through which embrasures are cut for the windows. Three sides of the house are thus coated, the front being generally left unprotected, but sometimes the house is entirely surrounded by turf walls, and the roof also has a coating of turf upon it. Externally, in front it has the appearance of several low barns, with their gable ends towards the approach, in the centre of one of which a low door is cut, while in the others a few small windows are placed here and there in no regular order, and each gable has a little

weather-cock on its summit. The interior of an Icelandic farm-house, however, it is no easy matter to describe. The stranger who enters them is as often as not suffering from a more or less severe concussion of the brain, his head having come in forcible contact with the top of the low door-way. I have often crept through a door not more than three feet high; the general height, however, is between four and five feet. Then, there is a descent of a step or two to an uneven, damp earthen floor, which is sometimes in puddles. All is pitch dark; and the height of the passage barely admits of a person standing upright; nay, not unfrequently a half-dried cod, or halibut, suspended from the ceiling, meets the intruder face to face. After a few yards there is an invariable stumble over a door-sill into another passage equally dark, which runs at right angles to the former, and of which there is no knowledge till the opposing earthen wall gives an unpleasant intimation of its presence. This passage right and left is sometimes straight, but always has either its floor or its roof uneven, so that the explorer is continually in danger either of falling down, or of hitting his head against a rolling ceiling. The passage leads on the right and left to rooms which are the best in the house.

They are from ten to fourteen feet square, and are coated entirely with deal, and often painted in various colours. One is set apart for visitors, and generally contains a bed, sometimes a four-poster, situated very often in a recess in the wall, before which a curtain is drawn in the day-time; also, a little table under the window, looking out through a turf embrasure, two or three chairs, a chest of drawers, a small looking-glass, a few Danish prints hanging against the wall, and sometimes a shelf or two of books. A bottle of schnaps and two liquor glasses stand upon the drawers, or window-sill. The floor of these rooms is raised a step above the rest of the ground-floor. Upstairs, over these rooms, are lofts, in which the inhabitants sleep. They are long low rooms, surrounded by a raised bench, from eighteen to twenty-four inches high, and three or four feet in width, on which the sleepers range themselves. The staircase is very irregular and dangerous, being often a ladder with half its spokes broken or loose, and, besides, it is in total darkness. The kitchen, placed on the ground floor and at the back of the house behind the best rooms, is, like the passage leading to it, dark and without windows. It is generally a large room, with a peat fire smouldering in its centre. A

round hole in the roof is the only vent for the smoke, so that everything is coated with soot. Quantities of peat and birch-wood are stored around, two or three tubs of water stand at hand, and a huge kettle is always on the large stones that form the fire-place, while many changes of damp garments hang and blacken on the rafters above. In addition to the kitchen there are other dark apartments, store-rooms, and sleeping-rooms; but the smells from dried fish and half-cured mutton, the choking effect of condensed smoke, the accumulated rubbish and smuts of ages, as well as the danger of breaking the head or neck, completely cured any curiosity we ever possessed of peering into these dark abodes.

The farmer and his family, with his labourers and their families, all live under the same roof. There are no such things as labourers' cottages in the country; in fact, two houses together are very seldom seen, except in the small towns and fishing villages. The whole household generally take their meals together, and seem outwardly to live on an equality. In the winter, for four or five months, they seldom move far beyond their immediate out-buildings, in which their cows and sheep are stalled. These poor animals are stowed away in dark houses,

like large oblong earth-mounds, with a small door at one end, but with no window; as a substitute, however, the turf on the flat-ridged gable is left loose, so that on fine days a little light and air can be admitted. There are several such buildings adjoining every farm-house, and the mud and filth about their door-ways are truly distressing.

Thíngnes is a little oasis of dry ground in the midst of a wilderness of morass. It is situated in the angle formed by the two rivers, the Grimsà and the Hvità, and is at a distance of about half-a-mile from their junction. The farm consists of a tract of springy bog-land, some miles in length, in which are many shallow lakes, varying in size with the weather. In some seasons of rapid thaw, the oasis becomes an island. The morass was covered with a long brown grass, which was declared to be very good for cattle. As a shooting-box for wild fowl it is a capital place, and in June salmon abound in the rivers; nearly 20,000 lbs. weight being annually exported to England by Mr. Ritchie, of Peterhead, who has an establishment for catching and curing the fish.

We made constant use of the dark kitchen, repairing thither every evening to cook our supper, for we lived almost entirely on game and fish of our

own killing, Icelandic fare not being very enticing. Dried-fish, rye-bread and skyr, or sour-curd, are their chief articles of food. They make butter from sheep's milk, and keep it through the winter in skins. It is very good when fresh made, but we found it rancid beyond conception in the early spring. Mutton is salted down in the summer, but the curing process is not perfect, and it has a high flavour, which is very obnoxious. Beef is very seldom met with; but, if it should appear, it can most certainly be put down as 'old cow'. I believe there are a few pigs in the island, but I never saw one.

Dried fish is the most extensively used article of food; and ling and cod are the most desired sorts. When caught, they are split open and hung upon lines, or exposed on the shore to the cold winds and the hot sun; this renders them perfectly hard, and they keep good for years. In this dried state it is called stock-fish. It is impossible to eat it until it has been well pummelled on a stone anvil, with a sort of sledge-hammer, formed by a round stone with a hole drilled through it for the handle to pass through; but, even after this severe ordeal, it requires Icelandic teeth and skill to eat it. Butter and stock-fish form the ordinary Icelandic dinner. After the

pummelling, the fish is cut up, or torn into strips of a convenient width to go into the mouth. The butter is not spread on the fish, but the two are consumed in alternate mouthfuls. A thin rye-cake, or pancake, toasted over a gridiron, or in a frying-pan, is the usual bread of Iceland. It is called kaka, and if eaten while warm and crisp is very good, but it will not keep long. No corn grows in the island; but around some farm-houses, in warm and sheltered spots, little gardens may be seen. In them potatoes, cabbages, and turnips, are planted; but they do not flourish, and seldom grow to any size.

Rye, rice, sugar and coffee, are the principal importations. They are to be found in every farm-house. Corn-brandy is the common stimulant, while snuff is the universal narcotic.

At Thíngnes we made some purchases of ponies from the neighbouring farmers. The report of our wants had gone abroad, and many of the best animals in Reykja-dalr were brought in for our inspection. After a few days at Thíngnes, we moved higher up the valley, to the farm of Reykholt, thinking that the nearer we were to the mountains, the better we should be informed of our difficulties. Our great desire was, to arrive as early as was possible at

a high table-land, or heiði, called Arnar-vatns-heiði. This forms the western centre of the island, and was supposed to be the breeding-place of many birds whose summer habitat had not yet been clearly made out. The knot, the sanderling, the grey-lag, bean, and pink-footed geese, were supposed to be among the winged denizens of those wild and desolate regions; and we determined to spend a few days there during the nesting season, to ascertain, if possible, the correctness of these suppositions.

On arriving at Reykholt, we pitched our tent on the top of the mound which is called Snorro's Castle. It was a very exposed position, but it was the only dry spot to be found, as the whole valley and the hills' sides were of the consistency of a sponge. This mound is a sort of buttress to a small plateau on the hill, on which the farm and church of Reykholt are built.

At the base of this mound, on its north-eastern side, is Snorro's Bath. It is circular in form, and about 15 feet in diameter, and is lined with blocks of hewn stone. Hot and cold water were originally laid on by means of aqueducts, the hot water being supplied from a neighbouring boiling spring called Scribla; these aqueducts, however, are in

a dilapidated condition, and do not now answer the intentions of their builder; the cold water does not flow in, and the hot water cannot be turned off; neither can the bath be emptied or cleaned, the waste pipe also being broken. It is now used only for washing dirty clothes. The temperature of the water in it we found to be 150° Fahr., while that issuing from Scribla was 210° Fahr.

Snorro Sturluson lived in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. He was a mighty Icelandic chieftain, and Reykholt was his stronghold.

Sunday was a fine bright day, and there was a large attendance at church. From our tent door we could see far up and down the dreary valley; and the congregation, as they came cantering up from every direction, made a very lively picture. They were chiefly women and children, the men being on the coast fishing. As everybody had ridden, the congregation of ponies outside the church was very large, to say nothing of the numerous foals which trotted by the side of their mothers. The ponies were tied together in pairs, the head of each to the tail of the other, so that it was impossible for them to escape. It being warm and sunny, the people stood round the door of the farm-house till twelve

o'clock, when the old priest came out and led the way to the church, whither they all followed him. After the service, our encampment was besieged, and all our belongings were examined with great curiosity. We opened the two doors of our tent, and the public streamed through, in at one door and out at the other. Some of the women were particularly curious about the knitting of our stockings, and the texture of our corduroy knicker-bockers was also minutely examined. Everybody looked through the field-glasses, and everybody admired our boots.

The bright Sunday was not followed by a bright Monday, but with the morning there came up a stormy wind from the south-east, driving before it torrents of rain and blinding sleet. While the latter drifted against our tent and snowed us in, the former saturated the ground underneath, and at length gave its long-sought opportunity to the wind, which, yelling in delight, tore up the tent pegs, and flapped and banged about our heads the heavy wet canvass. Our tent, among its many valuable properties, possessed that rare one of never becoming a total wreck. If the weather-side often succumbed to the fury of the blasts, the body held its ground. We took turns by night to guard the pegs, the watchman for the

time sallying forth clad in waterproof and armed with a bull's-eye lantern, a mallet, and some extra pegs.

By the way, I can truly recommend Edginton's travelling tent for stormy countries.

This mode of life being, as may be imagined, not very comfortable, we turned our thoughts towards the church, meditating a migration to it. The storms in their paroxysms had driven the rain through our canvass walls, and the snow and water were being forced under them. We asked permission to go there. 'Oh, certainly,' was the reply, 'only there was a body there ; perhaps we shouldn't mind that.' But we did mind it, and thought it better to wait till after the funeral, which was to take place on the following day.

Along with the body there was an uninhabited coffin in the church, the property of the old priest, in which he meant to rest when his worldly troubles were over.

But the weather becoming worse and worse, and the tent thoroughly untenable, we were compelled to move, and we sought refuge in the house. The small guest-room was allotted to us ; our beds, when spread out on the floor, completely covered it, and

when we were in our bags, the door could not be opened; moreover, the room overhead was filled with sick people, and the coughing, sneezing, clearing of throats, and other uncouth noises were incessant. One old lady all the while was droning forth the most monotonous ditty, as she turned her spinning-wheel. In the evening, we were applied to for remedies. We were told that there were twelve persons upstairs, and that they all had diarrhœa in their throats, a horrible complaint, it was said, which proved to be the influenza. We mixed a large jugful of strong sal volatile and water, with a dash of nitre in it. Gislason took it up, and stood by while the bowl was passed round and round till it was emptied. It ought to be said that most of the patients slept quietly after it.

The weather continued dreadful beyond conception; black clouds deluged us with torrents of rain and storms of snow and sleet; in the morning the valley was white with snow, in the evening it was flowing with water. At length the daylight itself became obscured: from morning to night it was all twilight, and the feeble ray which penetrated the deep embrasure in which the little window of our room was set, was barely sufficient to

read by. On two or three days, indeed, nerved by the energy of despair, we rushed out over the dreary hills to the north of the valley, and, floundering in bogs and morasses, visited some lonely lakes in pursuit of a few storm-beaten wild fowl, returning at night, draggled and drenched, to cook our supper in the dark recesses of the kitchen, while we hung up our soaking garments in the vain hope that the smoke from the smouldering fire might dry them. But this could not be endured long. The wind veered round from quarter to quarter, but with no improvement of the weather: nay, the wind increased in fury as it veered. Dr. Hjaltelin had certainly told us to expect bad weather, as he had observed that generally during the first part of May it was exceptionally bad, while in the early part of November it was exceptionally fine; but we had not expected such rough treatment as we were receiving, and after ten days of suffering, we gave in, and returned to our old quarters at Thíngnes, resolved to wait patiently till the country assumed a more benign aspect.

The deduction to be drawn from our experience of Iceland in April and May is, that the spring-time is not a merry time in Iceland. Should, however, any tourist visit that country early in the year, he

cannot be too particular in providing himself with the best waterproof that can be made. If a heavy pilot or shooting-coat becomes once thoroughly drenched, there is but little chance of its being dry again, unless a sunny day appears. The peat fires in the kitchens throw out little heat. They do not go out, certainly, and the embers, with the addition of a little birchwood, are soon fanned into a blaze when cooking is required; but when that is over the flames sink down and the embers whiten, the fire living within the smouldering heap until it is again wanted. Once I asked for a lucifer to light our lantern, but there was not such a thing in the house. 'Then, how do you light the fire?' 'It never goes out,' was the answer. 'But if it should go out, what would you do then?' 'Fetch some fire from the next farm!'

It is not the low temperature and the rain that are so intolerable in Iceland,—the traveller can easily defend himself against these (the thermometer never registered more than ten degrees (Fahr.) of frost while we were in the island),—but it is the wind. This is terrific; it impedes his progress, demolishes his tent, and drives the cold and rain through all his garments in a manner that is irresistible. Æolus in spring-time must hold his court there.

CHAPTER II.

THE HEIÐI.

Reykholt—Roads—Tungufljót—Alternating geysir—Kalmans-túnga—The Tún—A treat for supper—Ulfsvatn—The Heiði—Birds.

On the 27th of May, we returned again to Reykholt with a brighter sun above us. We found better roads, and had stronger ponies. Olavur, too, had finished his fishing, and had joined us, bringing with him Bjarni, a youth of extreme usefulness, who was to accompany us in our future travels.

The roads in Iceland are generally very bad, and not unfrequently exist only in name. To say that there is a road from one place to another is simply a form of speech, and need mean nothing more than that it is possible to get from the one place to the other. In mountain districts and on the dreary heiði to keep in the road is to go as straight as possible from one cairn to another. In

valleys and low lands one or two narrow paths form the road. In some places where the soil is soft and where there is much traffic these paths gradually become too deep to ride along with comfort; they are then abandoned and fresh ones are commenced close to them. Paths are thus multiplied. I have counted as many as sixteen running side by side, some of them being very deep. Ponies rush down these narrow gullies regardless of the corns of their riders whose feet bang, first on one side, then on the other, against mounds and rocks, or perchance are caught in some old twisted willow-roots which have been laid bare by the formation of the path. In rainy seasons most of the paths are used by the superfluous waters as a means of escape, and those on the hill sides then become young torrents.

We made a short detour from our road to visit Tungufljót, where is the alternating geysir. We had already passed it twice, but were prevented from examining it, owing to the inclemency of the weather. This geysir is situated on the right bank of the very tortuous river, Reykja-dals-à (the river of the valley of smoke,) a few miles from its junction with the Hvità, or white river. It is situated on a mound of red clay, some sixty yards in length, at right

angles to the river bank. On one side the mound slopes away gradually, and on the other, it is ragged and perpendicular. It is about twenty feet in height. We crossed the river just above the mound; and on looking at it, a more wonderful sight I never beheld. Its whole surface was a mass of geysirs, of all sizes, and between us and it were numerous streams of boiling water (fringed with moss of the brightest green) which went streaming and rushing down to the cold river. The water in these streams was not deep, but the soil around them was very treacherous. We sank, at times, nearly a foot in mud, the temperature of which was almost equal to that of the water. Our long boots were of great use, and we ran knee-deep into the river to wash off the heated mud. The surface of the earth near the springs was covered with a thick coating of silex. Boiling water was issuing from holes and cracks in every direction. In one place was a single monster, emitting a jet several feet in height. In another place was a geysir, surrounded by a dozen smaller ones. Others were in little caves; and some in ledges on the silex-hardened face of the mound. All were making a sullen, bubbling splash. If in addition to the sulphurous smell, the hot steam,

and the cold wind then blowing, the reader pictures to himself the dark red colour of the mound with the bright green moss below, the widely-barren country around, and the peacefully flowing river in front, he may form some idea of this strange and wild scene.

At the end of the mound furthest from the river, were the two largest springs. They were partly on the side of the mound, which at that end was not nearly so steep as at the river-side, nor was it so high. These two jets appeared to me to have been formerly the alternating geysir; but, if so, they both, while we were there, played away together. I perceived no cessation in either of them during the twenty minutes we were watching them. The various jets were not at all regular in height, but varied from two to five feet. There were many curious incrustations, some of which we brought away with us; and we observed many flowers and grasses blooming luxuriantly under the influence of the steam. The cracks, holes, and fissures, from which this boiling water is emitted must, I should think, be from eighty to one hundred in number.

Early the next morning, there was a grand review before the parsonage at Reykholt. All our animals and

their accoutrements were examined. They walked past in slow and quick time, in marching order, and as a finale, the whole twenty-six (eleven of them being laden,) were driven furiously at a stone wall, in which there was an aperture, sufficiently wide to admit of but one at a time passing through it. The confusion was horrible, but the result pleasing. Only one of the packages was disabled in the passage. It may be of use to intending travellers to be told that the packing of an Icelandic travelling-box is an art of the utmost importance, only to be learnt by experience. The havoc and confusion which can be wrought by one's day's journey in an apparently well-packed box is past belief. These boxes are 15 inches high 10 wide and 22 long, and two are slung across a pony's back. The traveller drives his ponies before him, and they revenge themselves by fighting, charging one another, and dashing their burdens against boulders and rocks in the most disastrous manner. Stoppages to readjust packs, or to put on new girths, are of daily occurrence. Everything should be wedged so tightly as to prevent any motion in the interior, and care should be especially taken that no pegs be rolled up in the tent, or a grievous hole will be the sure consequence. It

may be imagined, therefore, how serious and difficult a matter was our morning packing. Gislason left us on that day. We were very sorry to part from him as he was so cheerful and pleasant a companion; he had also been of great use, and had spared himself no trouble in procuring ponies, having oftentimes set out on long journeys to distant farms, in the most dreadful weather, that we might be thoroughly equipped with a good stud before he should be obliged to leave us. It was solely through his exertions that we were now prepared for our long journey.

At noon we started, and Kalmans-túnga was reached in the evening. Our tent was pitched in the tún, a sort of paddock, comprising the lands immediately adjoining the farm-house. It is encircled by a turf or stone wall, and seldom is more than ten acres in extent, though generally not more than two or three. Its surface is usually a series of closely-packed mounds, like graves, most unpleasant to walk over, the gutter, in some places, being two feet in depth between the mounds. I believe these mounds are generally attributed to the action of melting snow. This ground has all the attention and manure the farmer can bestow upon it. It is, besides, protected by some five or six curly-tailed dogs, who pursue, with

fearful barkings, any impious sheep or pony that dares to put foot within its hallowed precincts.

As a treat, the farmer presented us with three swans' eggs for supper. A hole was duly drilled in each, and the contents well stirred together with a small stick. They were then cooked, and proved excellent eating; being likened by one of the party to a custard pudding. But, as we drew near the end of our repast, the horrible truth flashed upon us: a large web-foot startled one of us, while a huge goggle-eye stared out from the spoon of another, in a most distressing manner. The discovery, however, came too late: we had supped well. The next day was spent in searching the surrounding woods for redwings' eggs; but we were not very successful, as most of the nests contained young birds, some of them nearly fledged. The nest was usually built in low shrubs, and in make resembled that of a blackbird.

The following day, May 30, we commenced our travels in earnest. We left Kalmans-túnga at 2 o'clock in the afternoon. It was late in the day to start on a long journey; but we were then in the regions of light: and if the sun sank away behind the northern hills, it was only that he might return again in a few minutes, to add new splendour to the crimson sky.

In a country so wild, so thinly-inhabited, and so desolate, it is, no doubt, a cheering thought to the traveller, struggling along over swampy wildernesses, that he cannot be benighted. Still, those hours which represent night, have a custom (in which they often indulge,) of bringing with them dense fogs and mists, especially in the high grounds, and these are more bewildering even than darkness.

At 5 o'clock, we arrived at the Surts-hellir caves. Their mouths being almost blocked up with snow and ice, made the descent into them a very difficult and hazardous enterprise; and we were unable to penetrate their inmost recesses, not having with us the necessary lights or torches. We crossed the Norð-línga-fljót, about two miles above the caves; and after six hours of the most fearful work, our weary, struggling caravan (the bogs being the most tenacious and the most dreary I ever saw,) arrived in disorder at the end of their journey at the north-east corner of the lake of Ulfsvatn (Wolf-lake). Here we expected to find grass for the ponies, and were very glad to hear Olavur exclaim, as we rode up (he had gone on before to select a camping ground) that there was plenty of grass, and the more so as while skirting the margin of the lake,

we had been commenting on the total absence of all visible vegetable life.

We pitched our tent, thinking that perhaps the twilight had deceived us, or that there was some favoured spot which had not come within our notice. Olavur was quite sure there was plenty of grass, and we went to sleep satisfied. The next morning we discovered this grass by no means so far off as we had expected. It had once been a long rank vegetable; now it was sodden and black. The greater part was under water, having been beaten down flat by wintry storms, in a bog now swamped. A little of it only was brown, and that was dry and tasteless. There were, in addition, a few willow-shrubs crawling along the ground. Such was the plenty in which our twenty-six poor animals had to luxuriate. It was a wonder that they ever lived through the four days that we were there. But Olavur persisted in saying that there was plenty of grass, and for several days after we had left he assured everyone we met that there was plenty of grass at Ulfsvatn; and perhaps he was right in his view, viz., that there was enough to keep them from dying.

Delighted at having at last reached the high grounds, or heiði, we perfected our encampment,

erected a fire-place of large stones, unpacked our boxes, and set our tent in order. In the afternoon we went out to investigate the solitudes around us. The whole country was found to be of the same description as that which we had ridden over on the previous day. It was a stony and boggy wilderness, of one and the same brown aspect from beginning to end. For three days we toiled about incessantly, first in one direction, and then in another, searching for birds and birds' nests. We visited all the surrounding lakes, and plodded through all the bogs (and they were not a few), but not a glimpse could we catch of any of the birds we were in search of. The lakes were partially covered with ice, and long brown 'grass' fringed their margins.

Wild swans were numerous, and several of their nests were found with the old birds sitting on them. The nests were easily seen a long distance off, being mounds nearly three feet high, formed of grass, mud, and sticks of willow. Scaup, and long-tailed ducks, and a few teal, were found on most of the lakes, as well as great-northern and red-throated divers. On Ulfsvatn, also, there were a quantity of great black-backed gulls, which bred in the small islands in the lake. We eat a great number of their eggs. In the

bogs and swampy places were found purple sandpipers and a few dunlins, and in the drier and more rocky parts we occasionally met with ptarmigan. We met with no other feathered creatures, except a pair of goosanders whose nest fell a prey to us. Probably it was too early for sanderling and knot; yet all the birds we did meet with were breeding. By means of some nets, which Olavur had borrowed at Kalmans-túnga, plenty of trout and char were caught in Ulfsvatn. The latter were remarkably good eating, nearly equal in flavour to salmon.

After three days, we became weary of sojourning in these wastes. The weather brought nothing but wind, sleet, and fog, and was so boisterous that on one day we were unable to light a fire. It was a gloomy and depressing place, and the mighty snow dome of Eyrícs-jökull looked down upon it continually with a cold and freezing stare. A guide, whom we had ordered to meet us from Reykholt, having come to us on the fourth night, we determined to leave without further delay.

CHAPTER III.

ULFSVATN TO HRÚTA-FJÖRÐR.

Start from Ulfsvatn—Nupsá—A misfortune—Inhospitality—Efri-núpr—Icelandic churches—Staðr—Hrúta-fjörðr—Dead sea fowl—Storm—Borð-eyri—Prest-bakki—Guð-laugsvík—Icelandic winters—Habits of the people—Hay harvest.

Our thoughts were now turned towards the north-west peninsula, a part of the island, as far as we knew, hitherto untraversed by strangers. The Missionary, Henderson, nearly fifty years ago, had extended his travels to the extreme west of the peninsula, but the northern and eastern parts of it were still unexplored regions to any but the natives. This peninsula is partially divided by the large fjörðr, called I'sa-fjardar-djúp, on the eastern side of which was Dránga-jökull, and on the western, Glámu-jökull. To visit these two ice-mountains and the country around them, was now our wish. We looked forward to bad and tiresome roads and to all manner of inclemencies of weather; but for these we were

prepared. The only real difficulty we expected to meet, was a lack of provender for our ponies. It was our plan to spend a month in the peninsula, to return to the mainland, and cross the northern part of the island to Akreyri and Mý-vatn, which latter place we hoped to reach by the middle of July; then to cross the Sprengi-sandr to the Skaptár-jökull, and return home by Hecla and the south.

Very early in the morning we were aroused by a terrible pattering of rain, which the violence of the wind was driving through the tent sides. The tent itself shivered and lurched in a very unpleasant manner. It required no little energy to creep out from under our warm blankets; but we found Olavur insisting on an immediate start. Although a little man and a good guide, he had one failing—he rejoiced in showing a total disregard to the weather, and never seemed so happy as when he was wet through; and because this was by far the worst day we had yet experienced, it seemed to him a powerful reason why we should immediately emerge from our places of comparative warmth and, in the face of the most pitiless storm, break up our encampment, and start for a twelve hours' ride over the trackless waste. It was in vain that we tried to convince him how much

more comfortable we should be, if we stayed where we were for another day.

We were forced to yield. There was no arguing with a man who stood at the tent door in his shirt-sleeves, without a hat on, already wet through, though it was not yet six o'clock. Packing up that morning, therefore, was a very wretched employment. Everything was wet and swollen. Nothing would fit in its right place. The tents refused to be folded, and, moreover, the herd of ponies, collected from the sheltered spots where they had passed the night, and which were now standing near ready to receive their burdens, at a sudden swoop of the blast, turned and fled, pursued by every article about the encampment that was unfortunate enough to have been exposed. Olavur took snuff prodigiously, and, accompanied by Bjarni, went in pursuit.

Left to ourselves for nearly two hours, we had ample time for contemplating, with gloomy forebodings, the journey before us. The route that we were to travel was miry in the extreme, and but little known. Our guide was the only man whom the pastor of Reykholt could recommend to us as being likely to know the way ;—but Olavur pronounced him to be 'ecki god' (no good). A dense fog had settled down upon the

face of the earth, precluding all possibility of seeing any landmarks; and, to crown all, a cold north-east wind, with sleet and snow, shut out all idea of comfort. Thus we sat upon our boxes, with our backs to the wind, awaiting Olavur's return with all the patience that we could command. The only pleasure that we experienced was a certain kind of 'stern joy' that our waterproofs were equal to the storm. At length, we started ; but misfortune was still following us. After the runaways had been reclaimed, and Olavur had adjusted everything to his heart's content, and when we were all moving slowly along, congratulating ourselves that it was no later than twelve o'clock—lo ! in the very centre of the first bog, and deeply embedded in the mud, we stumbled upon one of our own boxes. As we were leading the way it was at first very puzzling to conceive how the box had got there : but it too soon became evident. The blinding snow had enabled one animal to stray from the herd before we had started. Olavur again partook very largely of snuff, and disappeared in the snow. We, too, again turned our backs upon the elements, and waited a very long half-hour before the missing animal was recovered.

Our journey was then resumed, and for thirty miles,

a long, unvaried way stretched out before us, undulating and bare, a perfect labyrinth of lakes and bogs. The lakes were all fringed with a long, lank, weather-beaten grass; and thick, frosty-green masses of ice lined all their shores. As to the bogs, they were bogs indeed, in which mud, slush, and jagged rocks struggled for the mastery. It was a wonder that any pony had a leg left to stand upon. The unearthly song of the wild-swan, or the startled cry of the great-northern diver, at times came upon us through the mist, and rendered the utter deadness of the whole country the more depressing.

So thick were the snow and mist, that all attempts to find those solitary cairns, which alone mark the unfrequented track, were futile. Towards evening, we crossed a torrent whose deep bed was filled with snow, in which the water had eaten out huge caverns, and shaped the masses of snow into the form of curious cliffs and crags. It was found very difficult to reach the opposite bank. Soon afterwards, we passed between two lakes, the surface of one of which was very many feet higher than that of the other; and the waters flowed out from the higher into a pool some six or seven feet in diameter, and from thence, by some underground aqueduct, were conveyed away,

it is said, to the lake below. There was no visible egress from the pool.

It was very late when we heard the joyful news that we had reached the end of the heiði, and very gladly did we descend into the valley of the Nupsà. The last two or three hours had been very trying work. Many a baggage-laden animal had sunk down exhausted in the bogs, and had become so entangled in the mire that it had to be unladen before it could extricate itself. But our misfortunes did not end with the heiði. Our ponies well knew that a descent from the uplands indicated an approach to something like grass, and a new spirit was infused into them. They tore along the narrow and slippery path, which led by the river's side, with wonderful energy.

We had, at times, to mount over rocks and bluffs projecting into the stream; and it was on the side of such a rock that a narrow path was cut, at which two or three ponies rushed simultaneously, and one went over into the torrent below. The poor beast caught the ledge, or rock, by his fore-feet, and struggled hard to save himself; but, after two or three ineffectual efforts, his strength gave way, and he went backwards into the water. We had the mortification of seeing our beds and tent disappear beneath the wave. Luckily, the

water was sufficiently deep to break his fall, or else a tumble of nearly twenty feet must have killed him. As it was, he crawled into shallower water, and there he stood a piteous object. Olavur went in after him, and, having rescued our beds, stood knee-deep in the stream for twenty minutes, readjusting the pack. I should have thought that it would have been more comfortable to have done it on dry land, since, although it was a night in June, yet a north-east wind was driving before it clouds of sleet and snow, and it was very cold. But Olavur cared for none of those things. The rest of our ponies, eager for a home, had rushed on, followed by Bjarni; and we saw little of them till we reached the first farm, whose name sounded like Pharà. The farmer came out to see us, and Olavur and our guide respectfully asked leave to stop the night on his land; but after keeping us waiting a quarter of an hour, during which time he had extracted from us all the news he could, he declined to have us. Olavur afterwards explained to us that the farmer at Pharà refused to let us stay on his premises, on account of the damage which our ponies would have inflicted on his grass. This was the only case of inhospitality that I ever met with in Iceland; and we put him down as a brute, and started

again through the snow for Efri-núpr, which we reached about one o'clock on the following morning.

We dismounted, tired and weary, having been in the saddle more than twelve hours. No pastor lived at Efri-núpr, but the church-farm was occupied by a layman, who quickly made his appearance, and opened the church-door. Our host was very kind and attentive, making coffee for us, which, in our cold and famished state, was a great luxury, as (with the exception of a biscuit apiece) we had fasted since 7 A.M. He also produced mattresses and blankets from the church loft, which, in Iceland, is the usual store-room of the neighbouring farm.

Icelandic churches are very simple buildings and, in general, differ little from one another. Many, however, are in a much better state of repair than others, and on some a great deal of care and attention is bestowed. The parish church is a long, low, barn-like building, made of wood. Its sides are flanked by two turf walls, many feet in thickness, as high as the eaves. The roof is often covered with felt. There are no windows in the side walls; but there are two small ones, one on each side of the door, and two others in the eastern end, one on each side of the altar. For three-fourths of its length the church is fitted up with narrow seats,

or benches (facing the altar), which are uncomfortable to sit upon, the backs being too high. The remaining quarter, or chancel, is usually separated from the body of the church by a screen of open wood-work. The altar is placed between the windows in the east end, and is railed round; the space within the rails being about five feet by six. The rails are not uncommonly painted blue. A narrow wooden bench runs round the chancel, which is used exclusively by the male part of the congregation, the women sitting in the body of the church. A large metal baptismal-basin, or dish, hangs upon the wall. On the altar are two candles, which are lighted during the service; and above it is hung a wretched picture, either of the Crucifixion or the Resurrection. The altar itself is a little cupboard, or closet, in which the priest's habiliments are kept, and even candles, and other useful articles are deposited there. The pulpit is built in the screen, and often comes so nearly up to the low roof, that the head and shoulders of the preacher are above the rafters. One-half of the church roof is generally floored, and forms, as I have said, the store-house of the neighbouring farmer, be he priest or layman: and often, in the body of the church, all sorts of attire, both male and female, may be seen hanging on pegs from the walls. The

service, with the exception of the sermon, is chanted or intoned throughout; the priest either standing or kneeling in front of the altar, where he changes his vestments three times,—the clerk, who occupies the seat on the bench nearest the rails of the altar, helping him to do so.

Such is the ordinary Icelandic church. We saw, however, many churches that had been lately restored or rebuilt, and in most of these the turf walls had been omitted, so that there were often two or three pairs of windows, which were a great improvement, rendering the interior cheerful compared with the dusty gloom of the old buildings.

The cathedrals at Reykja-vík and Hólar are, I believe, the only two churches in the island that are composed of stone. The one at Hólar is an ancient building, built of a species of red-sandstone. It is the resting-place of a whole series of by-gone bishops. Its interior is plain, with the exception of a gorgeous altar-piece, whose folding doors contained, on their inward sides, the images of a crowd of saints, martyrs, apostles, and prophets, all of which were gaudily painted. Memorial slabs to some of the bishops were laid in the floor of the chancel.

We stayed the following day at Efri-núpr to recruit

our dejected stud. The weather was most inclement, and we strayed but a little distance from the church-door, which looked down from the bare hill-side on the valley and its torrent. The whole view was most dreary and monotonous. The guide who had piloted us across the heiði left us here and returned to Reykholt, delivering us up to the guidance of our host. The next day (June 6th) we left Efri-núpr, and after five hours' ride through cold and wet, over an uninteresting series of boggy hills and brown swampy valleys, we reached Staðr church, situated on another hill-side, but looking out on a broader valley, through which a rapid river rushed, emptying itself by many small mouths into the Hrúta-fjörðr, whose waves were dashing wildly on the coast. The opposite hills were higher than those at Efri-núpr; and here and there, at intervals up the valley, verdant spots might be distinguished where farm-houses stood. In spite of a hurricane of north-east wind, bitterly cold, we left Staðr the next day, and, descending into the valley, crossed the river mouths. Our direction was now due north, along the western shore of the Hrúta-fjörðr, which opens into the Arctic Ocean. We kept close to the water's edge; every now and then climbing over little cliffs, in places where the waves washed too near their base to admit

of a safe passage. Great numbers of dead sea-fowl lined the beach; some lying in heaps, twenty or thirty together, and others floating on the waters. They were chiefly razor-bills, guillemots, or divers,—birds whose only home is on the sea. What 'furious winter rages' those must have been by which these birds had been killed!

The fjörðr was closed in on either side by a long ridge of bare mountains, and the fury of the pent-up wind, as it rushed down from the Arctic Ocean up the fjörðr, was terrific. It tore off the waves and whirled them up into the air, and bore them along, together with the clouds of stinging hail which it had brought with it from the north. Many of the ponies refused to face the violence of some of the storms; and, turning their tails to the elements, stood stock-still. At Borð-eyri there was only a single deserted house. Here we had hoped, from its important look in the map, to have found a thriving town. It was a large, oblong, black, wooden building, with a few white windows, such as is usually built by Danish merchants, much resembling a barn with a weather-cock on the top. It was close to the water's edge, with an acre or so of smooth grass around it.

At the approach of winter the Danes leave these

inhospitable parts either for Reykja-vík or Copenhagen, and the owner of Borð-eyri had not yet ventured to return, so the hopes of adding a few luxuries to our vanishing stock of provisions were dispelled. We availed ourselves, however, of the shelter which the building afforded to dismount and take our luncheon, which was rather a grand one, as two sheep had been bought at Efri-núpr ; but an Iceland sheep, though very good eating, resembles what has been predicated of a goose ; it is too much for one, but not enough for two hungry travellers.

Our next resting place was Prest-bakki, a few miles further down the fjörðr. We took up our quarters in the church, situated on a little tongue of land running out into the fjörðr, and forming a small break-water. Thousands of eider-ducks, and large flocks of purple sand-pipers, and a host of other birds, crowded the little bay for shelter, and some of the smaller ones were so cowed by the storm that we were able to kill them with stones. The priest was a very hospitable man, but very nervous ; and when an attempt was made at a conversation in Latin, his confidence seemed to forsake him, and he retired, leaving us to devour twelve eider-ducks' eggs which he had set before us. In the evening, however, we extracted from him what know-

ledge he possessed about the northern parts of the island. He assured us that the north coast was still ice-bound, and that it would be impossible to cross the mountains to Ísa-fjörðr, and he tried to persuade us to relinquish our foolish attempt, detailing horrible stories of snow-storms and snow-drifts, and the fearful consequences of being overtaken by the one, or embedded in the other. No one, he said, had as yet crossed Steingríms-fjarðar-heiði, nor did he believe that it would be possible to do so for a month to come. We retired early to the church, to brood over these dismal statements; but being tired, and the priest's mattresses being very comfortable, we soon forgot them.

The next day our journey was continued down the fjörðr, though the same terrific wind and hail-storms tried to forbid our progress. For the first two or three hours of the way I saw nothing; I shrunk down as far as possible into my coat, and covered up my face; and having tied the reins of my pony in a knot and embedded my hands in three pairs of Icelandic mittens, I resigned myself wholly to the care of my steed, and was conscious only that we were proceeding against the wind. About four o'clock, the weather improved; and, occasionally, as the mist rolled along the opposite heights, we saw dimly through it, and observed a

bold and rocky coast-line, with huge and precipitous mountains emerging strangely from the waters. We soon after reached the bottom of the Hrúta-fjörðr; and the upliftíng of the mist revealed the dense mass of Bálka-staða-nes-höfði, in which the long line of hills on the opposite side terminated. On our right hand was now the Húnaflói, or great ocean-bay, from which many fjörðrs run up into the interior; and the green waves of the Arctic Ocean came rolling in, and broke on the shore with great fury.

As we approached Guðlaugs-vík, the coast-line became more broken and varied. Several thin sheets of rock stood out from the water, thirty or forty feet in height, against which the waves were dashing themselves into clouds of spray. Their appearance was very peculiar. The little we saw during the latter part of our ride, made us anxious to see more; but the envious mists concealed everything. At 'Vík (as Guðlaugs-vík is called for brevity's sake), it was an agreeable surprise to hear our native tongue. The good man of the farm approached us with, 'Welcome, Master!' and immediately led us into the house, which was clean, and in a great measure devoid of Icelandic smells. We gladly accepted his pressing invitation to occupy the best room.

Our host was a middle-aged man, and of a much smarter appearance than Icelanders generally are. We learnt from him, afterwards, that he had been employed in the Danish dockyards as a surveyor of timber, and that his business had taken him to many parts of Sweden, Germany, and England. His sojourning in more favoured lands had made him fully alive to the shortcomings of Icelandic board and lodging; and, during our stay with him, he was continually apologising for it, and very often, we thought, needlessly. Pointing to a very good bed, he would say, 'English good; that no good:' and at dinner time he insisted on 'That no good; but I have no more.' He was very communicative and intelligent, and told us all the best resting-places in our route. But his idea was, that we were bound on a fruitless journey. He also had heard of the ice, and of the dreadful state of Steingríms-fjarðar-heiði; but upon Dránga he pronounced decidedly, 'No good; man cannot come to top of Dránga; ice down to sea, no good; very cold, no good.'

Saturday night and Sunday, the elements raged with all conceivable fury. The wind was a wind that penetrated, as if they had been nothing, the densest masses of clothing that our coats of greatest girth

could be induced to enclose, and the thermometer stood at 25° Fahr. We were, indeed, thankful that we had found so comfortable an abiding place; and shuddered at the thought of the bare hill-side in the tent.

Our host gave us some very dreadful and dreary stories of Icelandic winters. He told us of snow-storms, and drifts, and of swollen torrents, bearing all before them. He told also of auroræ boreales so bright that books could be read by their light. He was a man of considerable substance, as an Icelander, having two farms, the one at 'Vík and another under the Great Jökull (Snæfell), where he always passed the winter, and witnessed all the horrors he told us of. He mentioned some farms under the Great Jökull situated in exposed places, which in times of heavy snow were completely covered in, and where the inhabitants cut steps in the snow from their doors to the surface above, and planted large flagstaffs, with flags on the summits of their houses, so that those who travelled above might know of their whereabouts. Isolated sheep and cattle-houses are served in the same manner; otherwise, after heavy falls of snow, it would be impossible to find them. The Icelander travels easily over the snow with his snow-shoes, finds his way to the flag-staff, and then digs to the roof of

the house, through which he lets himself down to the flock below.

During the long winter months, the inhabitants of these lonely farms lead very monotonous lives. The women make gloves, stockings, jerseys, and other woollen apparel, and the men attend to their cattle. Almost every man can read and write; and a few books are to be found in most houses. Every farmer is a blacksmith and shoes his own ponies, and mends and makes nearly every implement his farm requires.

Living such solitary lives in winter, it is not to be wondered at that they talk and gossip in the warmer weather. This seems to be their chief amusement; and a passer-by is like the arrival of a mail-coach. The household congregate round him, and they stand and sit for hours, talking and taking snuff.

Whenever we arrived at any place, from the first minute of our arrival to the last moment of our stay, Olavur, when not attending to us, was always deeply engaged in argument of some sort with one or other of the inhabitants. They seldom amuse themselves with games of any sort. I have sometimes seen dominoes, and occasionally a pack of cards.

The great business of the year is the hay-harvest, which lasts for nearly two months, July and August. Every person capable of wielding a scythe or rake is

pressed into the work. The best hay is cut from the tún, or land, adjoining the farm-house; but, in addition to this, the farmer subjects to a process of cutting all the broken hill-sides, and boggy, undrained swamps, that lie near his dwelling. The blades of the scythes are very short. It would be impossible to use a long-bladed scythe, owing to the unevenness of the ground. The cutting and making of hay is carried on when the weather will permit, through all the twenty-four hours of the day. When the hay is made, it is tied in bundles by cords and thongs, and carried away by ponies to the earthen-houses prepared for it, which are similar to, and adjoining, those in which the cattle are stalled. It is a very curious sight to see a string of hay-laden ponies returning home. Each pony's halter is made fast to the tail of the preceding one, and the little animals are so enveloped in their burdens, that nothing but their hoofs and the connecting ropes are visible, and they look as though a dozen huge hay-cocks, feeling themselves sufficiently made, were crawling off to their resting-places.

When sheep are stalled in houses a long distance from the farm-house, every such house has a hay-barn attached to it, as it would be impossible to transport the hay over the snow.

CHAPTER IV.

STEINGRÍMS-FJÖRÐR.

Bitru-fjörðr — The Isthmus — Mókolls-dalr — Kolla-fjörðr — Fell — A ship — Midnight disturbance — Corpse — Icelandic Funerals — Steingríms-fjörðr — Húsa-vík — Víði-dalsá — A sunset.

LATE on Sunday evening, Olavur came in to tell us that the bad weather was over, but we scarcely dared to believe him, and went out ourselves to see what change had happened in the aspect of the heavens. Our joy was, indeed, great at seeing the northern horizon clear, and the mists and clouds, that had been hanging about the mountains, rolling away to the south. The next morning, everything was pleasantly changed. No longer were indistinct lumps just visible through mists and murky vapours, but bold headlands and snow-capped tops stood out and glittered in the warm sun; and bays, and creeks, and rocks 'fell in,' and assumed their proper places. Our host was as delighted at the change as we were. 'Good

for me, good for you : this very good ;' and he urged us on with a friendly pressure, adding, that experience forewarned him that such a state of things was too good to last.

The view, as we stood at the farm-door, was very beautiful. Immediately in front, the waters of the broad fjörðr danced and sparkled in the sun, and dark mountain masses, streaked and spotted with snow, rose up on the opposite shore, while half way across, the long headland of Bálka-staða-nes-höfði split the fjörðr into two smaller ones. This was a heavy brown ridge-topped mass, with a bold front to the waters, and of vast size. On our left we looked on to the Arctic Ocean, over the broad waters of the Húnaflói ; and there, too, stood out another huge headland called Guðlaugs-höfði, snow-topped and firmly-seated on perpendicular cliffs. But the great charm was the clear sky and warm sun, and the feeling that once again we were thoroughly awake. Round the farm-house the grass was very green, and we noticed many smooth and meadow-like strips. They were a homely and refreshing sight ; so different from the usual troubled surface of Icelandic grass land.

We took a hearty farewell of our host, expressing our gratitude for his kindness to the utmost of our

power. For a little time our road lay along the shore; but we soon left it, and ascended a path which led over the hills on our left hand, cutting off by this means the corner of Guðlaugs-höfði, and descended to the shores of the Bitru-fjörðr, one of the smaller fjörðrs that run up from the Húnaflói. The day was delightful, and the view from the hill-top very exhilarating. On every side were snow-covered hills and mountains, and the waters beneath us were like glass. The small, fleecy clouds were mirrored in them, and the calm was so universal, that the inclemencies of the last week seemed like a dream to us. We came down to the water's edge, where the path was good; the beach was shingly, and covered with drift-wood. In the far distance, on the other side of the fjörðr, we could descry the farm of O'spaks-eyri, and we could see many a long hour's ride ahead before we should reach a ravine near it, up which our road lay. As we journeyed up the fjörðr, our course was west.

At the head of Bitru-fjörðr lies the isthmus, which joins the great north-west peninsula of Iceland to the mainland. It was a grassy valley, or rather basin, leading up to some inconsiderable hills, which seemed to have nothing to recommend them but their bogs. After rounding the head of the fjörðr, we returned, as

it were, on the northern side. This path was very bad and narrow, and the hills were a wall on one side, and the waters a barrier on the other. Olavur would hear of no stopping at O'spaks-eyri for coffee, as it was already 7 o'clock, and the way to Fell was long and miry. Moreover, an ominous cloud or two had appeared in the north-east, to which he pointed, saying, 'Ecki god.' So we pushed on.

Soon after passing O'spaks-eyri, we took advantage of a break in the mountains, and held our way due north. This valley was browner, with bigger stones and bigger bogs, and more of them. The hills on either side were uniform in height, but sloping up more gradually than usual. Over one of these side-hills it was our arduous task to climb. It was, indeed, a dreary way—a never-ending succession of snow-patched slopes. One after another was passed, but yet there was another still higher, and then another. The ponies were sadly exhausted, and one wretched animal sank down : he was unburthened, and left where he fell. When, at length, the hill-top was reached, a huge mountain reared itself up in front, and seemed to forbid further progress. It was some time before a narrow valley was discovered, which went down almost perpendicularly under the mountain side, and into which we had to descend :

a narrower, deeper, or more precipitous gorge I had never seen. We rode up to the very brink of it, and then looked down a dizzy distance into the valley below, through which a winding torrent tore along.

It seemed, indeed, foolhardy to attempt a descent into such a place with the ponies; but Olavur declared that it could be easily accomplished; and, so saying, he urged the whole herd over the edge, and down they all went, sliding on their haunches. They showed, however, their dislike to that way of proceeding, by resolutely refusing to budge an inch when once they had gained firm hold on the hill-side. Every animal had then to be forcibly dislodged. We dismounted at the top, and helped in the general push. It was by no means a pleasant occupation; for whenever we cast an eye behind, there was sure to be some unfortunate animal just above us, very uncomfortably placed, with its four legs gathered together, and seeming to be balanced on a point, with a slight preponderance in our direction. Two very jaded and dejected creatures had to be pushed the whole way down. It was a long time before all had reached the bottom; and then everything was so disarranged, that each burthen had to be re-adjusted before we could proceed. The grass was green in the valley, and the road

was good. Mókolls-dalr is the name of the valley, and we had descended into it just at the head of the Kolla-fjörðr. We crossed the torrent, and, reaching Fell, in three-quarters-of-an-hour, took up our abode in the church, about 10 o'clock.

It was quite necessary to stay a day at Fell on account of the ponies; five or six of them being already useless from fatigue and want of proper food, —in fact, several had never recovered from the effects of the 'grass' at Ulfsvatn. The poor animals were never allowed to approach the little grass that really was good for anything, but had to feed on the remains of former years, which had grown, and now lay black and sodden in wild and uncultivated places. While we were at Fell great excitement was caused among the good people of the farm by the appearance of a ship on the horizon, as Icelandic seas on the southern and north-western shores are very shipless things. We also were very anxious to know whither she was bound; since, if we could but get at her, we might be able to buy some biscuits, the black bread having become odious to us. The farmer, too, was anxious to find out her course—was it the Danish merchantman, the often-wished-for, but not-yet-expected ship? He watched her the whole morning

through our field-glasses, and in the afternoon declared her to be the Danish vessel. He told us that she contained a merchant who came with a cargo of Icelandic wants, and that he was bound for Skelja-vík, in Steingríms-fjörðr. There she would cast anchor, and remain a floating ship till the autumn storms drove her away to seek a more hospitable berth at Hamburgh. Skelja-vík was immediately marked down in the map as a desirable halting place.

We strolled down to the fjörðr to enjoy the evening calm, and, if possible, to shoot some harlequin ducks. The air was remarkably clear and still. Two narrow deep valleys run down to the Kolla-fjörðr and join about a mile from the water; they are divided by a backbone of lofty black hills, which terminate in a monster buttress, whose seaward side is slightly concave, and in the concavity is the little church and farm-house of Fell. Down each of the valleys flowed a torrent, which spread into a rapid river. The outside hills on either side were mountainous, and uniformly brown, and ran out, in a continuous line, to the shores of the Húnafloi; thus forming the coast line of the Kolla-fjörðr. In this situation is Fell; and when seen in the still, calm evening-time, it seemed a very charming spot.

That night heavy black clouds rolled up from the north-east, and a few big drops of rain made us seek the shelter of the church. They passed over however before we retired to bed, but a fretful wind came up from the waters and moaned and sobbed among the hills, and at times a violent gust rushed round the corners of the church with a long-drawn wail, which made the old door to jingle and creak on its rusty hinge, and the weather-cock to screech in answer to it. The night indeed was full of sad noises, but although the question was raised as to the expediency of buttering the hinge and the weather-cock, no one was inclined to get up and abate the nuisance. A little after midnight, however, we were disturbed by whisperings at the church-door and became aware of the presence of several men, but being heavy with sleep we heeded them not, and considering them to be but curious natives, we only crept the deeper into our bags to shut out the cold air which came in at the open door. But soon after Olavur came with a long face and declared something to be 'ecki god': we were too sleepy to understand him; we thought that he meant to say that some one had got the small-pox, and that, as was often the case, they had come for medicine, so we

declared that we had none for that malady, and that it was 'ecki god' to disturb us at that hour. He then left us muttering something about a pail of cold water, and a sleepy voice from a bag answered that a pail of cold water would do the sufferer no good.

The next morning revealed the mystery of the night. A man at a neighbouring farm having died of some disease, the relations had brought the body in the night and placed it in the church; and there in the morning we found the coffin on the tops of the seats near the door, and we found also that our trusty guide had surrounded it with pails of cold water to stop the evil influences of infectious gases. Ever afterwards we locked the church-door at night. But it is advisable also for those who sleep in Icelandic churches to do more than this. Icelandic funerals are conducted after this manner. As soon as the coffin is made, the body is placed in it, and brought on the back of a pony, strapped crossways, to the church, where it awaits the day of interment, when the friends and relations of the deceased assemble at the church-farm and attend the funeral. Bodies are carried in this manner very long distances over bogs and rivers, many farms being fifteen or twenty miles distant from a church. Such being the

case, it is always a wise precaution before lodging in a church, to examine whether there is a body in it waiting interment. After this discovery we began strongly to suspect that a small oblong box which had occupied a place in the chancel within a few feet of our beds, and which we had looked upon as some of the farmers' goods, was also a coffin, though it had no peculiar shape to indicate its nature, and on investigation our suspicion was found correct.

The next day, Wednesday, June 11th, we left Fell, and continued our journey along the northern shore of the Kolla-fjörðr, passing by the farm of Kolla-fjarðar-nes, one of the spots our friend at 'Vík had recommended to us. It had, indeed, a pleasant aspect, being situated on the northern shore of the fjörðr whose name it bears, and just at the point where its waters run up from the Húnaflói. Around the farm the grass-land was flat and as green as could be wished, and it was surrounded by a good post-and-rail fence, instead of the usual mud bank. There was a little windmill, and a mass of farm-buildings, neatly arranged, and all were as green as the grass around them. There were also several boats drawn up on the shore. Altogether, it had a well-to-do appearance that was quite cheering. The quantity of sheep and

lambs, too, on the cliffs behind the farm, with several cows on the shore, bespoke wealth and comfort. Following the shore, our course was now changed again to a westerly direction; and we followed for the next two days the winding course of the Steingríms-fjörðr. The travelling was very much better; the path was broad, good, and grassy; and the weather delightful. We rode along a strip of flat grass, varying from thirty to one hundred yards in width. On one side of it the cliffs were perpendicular, but of no great height; on the other there was a long line of drift-wood and sea-weed; then a few yards of shingle and large stones; then the breakers and the blue sea. Hundreds and hundreds of eider-ducks studded the shore, and mergansers and gulls were almost as numerous. Here and there, also, a huge seal flapped itself into the waters from off some nearly submerged rock, disturbed from its sunny slumbers by our approach. In places, the cliffs declined to a gentle slope, and then we obtained glimpses of the interior.

The country rose in plateaus. A few hundred yards inland there was a steep elevation, apparently of similar height to the cliffs we rode under. The surface was then flat again, or sloped away

gradually to another rise further inland, and so on. But this formation was not regular. In many places, where it ought to have been perpendicular, it sloped up to the next rise. We rode upon a flat; and *perhaps* the same formation was continued under the waters to the bottom of the fjörðr. The face of the country was grassy, patched and spotted with grey trap rocks, similar to those which formed the terraces, giving it a wild and broken appearance.

The farm of Kirkju-ból, also on the sea-shore, was another very flourishing place. Great order and neatness prevailed around it, and smooth, grassy tracts enclosed it. We passed several teams of ponies laden with drift-wood, which was very abundant on the shore, the whole coast-line being covered with it. It appeared as though the sea had chosen this retired spot to disgorge its ill-gotten goods. Soon after leaving Kirkju-ból, a range of hills crossed our path, and finished abruptly in the sea. They were easy to cross; and we descended again, by a zigzag and very steep path, to the shore. The cliffs had now disappeared; and the hills which we had just left behind us curved away inland and enclosed a vast, swampy grass-land: but the shore was still a hard flat road, being raised a few feet above the neigh-

bouring swamp. This, we were told, was the domain of the farmer of Húsa-vík, whose house we could see a few hundred yards before us.

We halted at Húsa-vík for half-an-hour, trying to hire a boat to carry us to Staðr, or, at least the heavy portion of our baggage, for the ponies were very weary. While Olavur was trying to arrange matters with the farmer, we stretched ourselves out on the smooth grass, and thoroughly enjoyed the scene. The fjörðr was a charming sight. Its blue waters were as blue as those of the lake of Geneva, and the perpendicular mass of the little island of Grímsey blocking out the sea, gave to the tranquil waters the appearance of a lake ; while the stern array of snow-streaked peaks and ridges around us, added grandeur to the scene. Olavur was unsuccessful in his endeavours to procure the boat : £5 a day was asked for it, which we declined to pay. A cup of tea had been prepared, and we were invited to step in and drink it. We were led up-stairs to an upper chamber, which was reached by means of a ladder. I had never been shown up-stairs before—the guests' room being invariably a room on the ground floor. This was a garret-shaped room, lined throughout with new deal, having one small window, which might have answered

as a loophole for a blunderbuss. We were surrounded by an admiring family, remarkable for their cleanliness. The farmer himself volunteered to be our guide to Víði-dalsà, the road no longer lying along the sea shore.

From Húsa-vík to Víði-dalsà, the country was very curious to look upon. It appeared as though it had been once filled with regular terraces, which had been broken up into small pieces, and were now heaped together in the wildest confusion. Here some were piled up one above another to a great height, and then, again, others stood at right angles to one another; some appeared smashed together; some were steep and perpendicular, others all aslope; all were stony on their faces; and swampy hollows occupied the spaces between them. Over such a country we proceeded but slowly, and did not arrive at Víði-dalsà till eight o'clock.

This was another very well-to-do place. The farmer gave us a hearty welcome; the house was clean, and the room allotted to us was comfortable, having just received a new lining of Norwegian deal. After supper, about 10 p.m., the evening being very calm, we took our guns, and, walking beside the rushing river, followed its course to the fjörðr. The scene was so

enchanting at the river's mouth, that we gave up the pursuit of wild-fowl, and sat down on the beach, gazing out on the waters. The objects were the same as we had seen at Húsa-vík, only the fjörðr was narrower, and the light breeze had died away. The waters were like glass. The surrounding peaks and masses, and the island of Grímsey, seemed to have gathered closer around us ; and all were lighted up and crowned with the wonders of an Arctic sunset. All the glories of colour were presented before us. Dark, sombre masses, purple at the base, passed through every lovely tint to a bright red on their summits, and rose-coloured snow peaks stood out from black rocks, steeped in the deepest gloom, while every shade of orange and yellow clouds streaked the sky above them. Then there was the sky itself, of a pale, soft green, an indescribable colour that haunts the Arctic midnight. Add to this, that the mountains and hills were all faithfully mirrored in the calm waters, and close to us, in a little bay, the schooner lately seen at Fell, lay silently at her anchor, with her sails reefed and her image beneath her. The only sounds were the splashing and rushing of the torrent near us, except when, at times, the flocks of eiders and long-tailed ducks, floating on the water like black specks, burst forth into a chorus of

cooings, drowning even the torrent's rush. Altogether it was a scene of indescribable beauty.

On our return to the farm, we shot some harlequin ducks on the opposite bank of the torrent; and the wading through the water to reach them was very exciting work. One of the party was carried off his legs, but escaped to land without injury. We learnt from our host, that the schooner had but just arrived at Skelja-vík, and that, according to the law of the land, she could not retail any of her goods until her papers had been signed by the Sysselman (I suppose a license was required), and that that functionary had not yet arrived. Orders, therefore, were given to Olavur to proceed on the following morning, and hold a friendly meeting with the captain, explaining to him our peculiar circumstances, and, if possible, to bring away with him such things as we were most in need of. Skelja-vík was but a short distance off, and Olavur did not take long to execute his orders. He returned with a beaming countenance before 7 o'clock A.M. The captain had acknowledged that necessity was more potent than law, and Olavur had the run of the store-rooms.

CHAPTER V.

STAÐR.

Improved farms—Staðr Steingríms fjörðr—Sheep-shearing —Steingríms-fjarðar-heiði—Glámu Jökull—Lági-dalr.

We left Víði-dalsà about 12 o'clock. The weather was very pleasant, and our path was by the shore of the fjörðr. We were soon abreast of the little schooner. She was a very pleasant object and rode easily on the water. The beach was a series of small bays filled with prodigious quantities of mussel-shells. A little above high-water mark the grass was good, and we rode pleasantly over it; but as soon as we left the coast the travelling became bad. We found short, deep valleys with perpendicular sides, rocks, stones, and slippery ways, intersected with bogs and miry places. One farm-house was perched on the edge of a precipice, and looked down into a sort of modern railway-cutting gorge that we were passing through. Having lost our way, we were anxious to make

inquiries, but were unable to reach this inaccessible dwelling, and Olavur had to make a considerable detour to obtain the information we required. After some little wandering through bare and confined gorges, we at length emerged at the top of a larger valley, which led down to the fjörðr, and the view from our exalted position was charming. The railway formation again appeared in the shape of two immense embankments, one above another, which ran parallel to each other down to the water on the right hand side of the valley. Their colour, too, a chalky white with dark and dirty patches, added to the deception. The valley itself was swampy, and treacherous cotton-grass grew all over it. Here we met a party of Icelandic horsemen journeying to the south to Reykja-vík. They were just emerging from their winter's sleep. They saluted us, and we passed on. Olavur, however, was detained by the astonished islanders, and when he again overtook us, we learnt that the Sysselman of those parts was there, and also the son of the pastor of Staðr (a student at the college at Reykja-vík), at whose house we were to sojourn that night.

We did not proceed far down the valley, but turned away to our left before we came to the little farm of O's, whose green grass looked very pleasant by the

side of the blue and sparkling waters of the fjörðr. Our road among the mountains was very bad, and the country very broken—a perfect wreck, where mountains and valleys seemed to have been torn up and dashed to pieces by the fury of the elements. We emerged again on the shore near to Hrófberg, another goodly place to look upon, on a commanding position on the top of a steep cliff, the waters washing its base. All the farms along the coast line of the Steingríms-fjörðr were in a far better condition than any others that I had seen in Iceland. Much greater order and neatness prevailed in the arrangement of the sheep-folds and other out-houses. The tún too was far better attended to and, consequently, much better in itself, and a certain well-to-do air of comfort reigned around.

Leaving Hrófberg behind us, we turned inland up the broad valley to Staðr Steingríms-fjörðr. This broad valley is at the head of the fjörðr, and runs in a north-westerly direction. Its appearance was not prepossessing, and the hills on either side were tame and uninteresting. A large stream came down it from the mountains, and entering the fjörðr, through many mouths, cut up the valley into numerous deltas, and formed many small islands and sand-banks, all of

which bore marks of submersion; and it appeared that at times the whole valley must have been filled with one broad torrent to the fjörðr. The church of Staðr, and the priest's house, were situated about two English miles from the head of the fjörðr, on the northern slopes of the valley. The priest was not at home. He had left early in the morning for Skelja-vík. He had heard of the ship's arrival, and was anxious to get his letters and newspapers, and to hear from the captain all the news of Europe. He must have been on board the ship when we passed by. We were shown into the church, a far cleaner and more spacious building than we had as yet inhabited. It had been very lately restored, and the huge earthen buttresses, which usually form the sides of Icelandic churches, had been done away with and, consequently, the windows admitted twice as much light. The paint also was clean, and the screen, which generally cuts the church in two, like a partition wall, was not there.

While we were taking our supper in the house, the priest returned. He was an old man, nearly seventy years old, thin and sallow, with a good-natured expression of countenance. He was not communicative, and with the exception of *bonus dies*, we could

extract no Latin from him, and he did not understand our Icelandic.

Part of our supper consisted of Icelandic moss soup. In those parts of the island where this moss is to be found, it is collected and dried. It grows on the low moorlands, and is to be found in great abundance about Ljósa-vatn in the north-eastern part of the island. When used as food, it is boiled in milk and served up like soup. It is not unpleasant, being a soft, glutinous substance; but its flavour is rather sickly.

The next stage being a long one, and over the dreaded Steingríms-fjarðar-heiði, we determined to rest a day. Only two journeys had been made over the heiði this year; and, on both occasions, the report of the road was very bad.

We enjoyed our rest very much. It was a beautiful sunshiny day, with a bracing wind. The skinning of several harlequin ducks occupied us a great part of the morning.

While at breakfast, we witnessed the Icelandic method of sheep-shearing. Three or four powerful young women seized, and easily threw on their backs, the struggling victims. The legs were then tied, and their wool pulled off by main force. It seemed, from

the contortions of some of the wretched animals, to be a cruel method ; but we were told that there is a period in the year, when the young wool, beginning to grow, pushes the old out before it, so that the old coat is easily pulled out.

In the afternoon we walked down to the deltas and sand-banks, and succeeded in shooting several harlequin ducks. We also found some skua-gulls' nests, which we robbed. We had a great deal of wading to go through ; and some of the streams were broad and rapid and, in some places, dangerous.

On our return home the shearing was still going on. A great pile of wool was heaped up by the door, but we kept at a safe distance from it. The condition of the young women must have been very terrible, but they seemed to pay but little attention to the swarms of insects that were creeping about.

We left Staðr at 10.30 the next morning, and took our course up the valley, passing several little farms—dingy little places, with no appearance of comfort about them. The valley became narrow, with precipitous sides, and an angry torrent zigzagged through its basin, amid grey rocks and swampy bogs. An hour's ride brought us to the last farm, and to the head of the valley, a mountain wall, on whose preci-

pitous face a winding path, like a line of straggling chalk, could be discerned. The assistance of a young man was procured to guide us over the wastes above. As the road was a difficult one to find, it had been well marked with cairns; but the priest at Staðr warned us of the possibility of some of them being buried in snow after the late bad weather. Moreover, a snow-storm, he said, was not only possible, but probable.

We were three-quarters of an hour in reaching the heiði at the top; and, from observations of the barometer, we had ascended about nine hundred feet. A heavy shower of rain, during the ascent, turned into sleet at the top, and the weather became dull, cold, and heavy. Olavur had pushed on with the baggage, so that on our arrival at the top (for contrary to our custom we had walked up), we found Bjarni alone, holding our ponies. He also soon disappeared, leaving us to follow in their track as fast as we could. The country was most monotonous, stony, and bare. Long undulations swelled up and sank down again, like the waves of a rolling sea. The only object in front of us was the solitary cairn on the far horizon, to which we were making our way. It was an ever-recurring cairn, for no sooner had we reached the side of one from which we hoped to look down upon the fjörðrs below,

or to gaze upon the cold heights of Dránga or Glámu Jökull, than there was another, its very image, on another horizon, with a dreary, snow-patched waste between. This tiring work lasted for four hours, during which we gradually ascended, and the snow became more and more continuous, till, at last, the whole country was covered, and the ponies sank into it to their girths. It was necessary to walk, which our heavy boots and cumbrous clothing rendered a very unpleasant proceeding. Olavur, and the baggage, were occasionally caught sight of, toiling along in the distance. At last, a huge mass of snow appeared. It was a long distance off, and of a very peculiar appearance. It presented to us a long range of snow domes, gradually ascending, higher and higher, from south to north. Their tops were perfectly smooth, and appeared uniform, but under these cupolas, large, black rocks seemed to bulge out over the side of the mountain. This was Glámu Jökull, one of the objects of our journey; and we hailed its appearance with delight. We examined it with our glasses, and were already speculating on the best way to reach its summit, when we suddenly came upon the disconsolate Olavur, who, being alarmed at our long delay (we had been moving very slowly), had sat himself down on a stone, and

was awaiting our coming with fresh ponies. We were glad of the change, as our animals were tired.

But Olavur had no compassion on our weary steeds. He declared it was all our fault, and that so slow a mode of progression was 'ecki god'; and, so saying, he mounted his pony and, driving our tired animals before him, led the way at so reckless a speed, over the terrible road of sharp rocks and stones, packed so thickly as to hide the earth's surface, that we were unable to keep up with him. We could not continue that vigorous flapping of our legs against our ponies' flanks, which is requisite to keep an Icelandic pony at his greatest speed. Before proceeding far, however, we saw, on reaching a brow, Olavur, and all the baggage, below us. We had been descending for some time, and now we were going to leave the heiði by a descent, nearly as steep as the ascent we had made in the morning. The valley was rough and rugged; and through it a furious torrent hurled itself down a deeply-eaten trough, causing some fearful rapids and horrid-looking, tortuous falls.

At 8 o'clock P.M. we crossed the river, which swept under the very walls of the little farm of Lági-dalr.

The tent was soon pitched, and very glad were we to shut ourselves in for the night. The day's

journey of nine hours had certainly not been very long; yet, owing to the dreadful state of the country we had traversed, it had been very fatiguing.

Sunday was spent in quietness. Many consultations were held as to what was the best course to pursue. There were three journeys which it was our wish to make, and which, in a certain degree, seemed to branch off from the place in which we now were. One to the town of I'sa-fjörðr, at the bottom of the great Fjörðr, another to Glámu on the west, and the third to Dránga, on the east of it. I'sa-fjörðr could be easily reached in a boat, being about thirteen hours distant; but, as regards the other two, no one could give any information. The farmer had never been asked such a thing as the way to Dránga: he knew whereabouts it was, but that was all. He declared it to be utterly impossible to get any way up it. After much talking between Olavur and the inhabitants, which ended in nothing, it was determined for the present to make Lági-dalr our head-quarters, and, leaving our heavy luggage behind, to start off and find a way, as best we could, either to Dránga or Glámu. We fixed no route, but left it to circumstances to direct our course.

CHAPTER VI.

DRÁNGA-JÖKULL.

I'sa-fjörðr—Hamar—A'rmúli—Ascent of the Dránga—View from it—A battle-field—Return to the tent.

On Sunday night there was a heavy storm of wind and rain from the north, and there was some prospect that the prognostications of our friend at 'Vík might turn out to be too true; and, if so, sailing in open boats would not be agreeable. About mid-day on Monday we left Lági-dalr, having reduced our train to three lightly-laden animals, carrying a small tent and blankets, with changes of clothes and provisions for a week. The day, though calm, was dark and overcast. The ride to the I'sa-fjörðr was uninteresting; the valley being bare, stony, and broken; but the torrent roared more impetuously than ever in its narrow bed.

On the shores of the fjörðr there was a good-sized boat, which Olavur immediately pronounced to be 'no

good.' We sat down beside it, while he went in search of the owner. There was something awfully grand in the scene. There were the dark blue mountains, snow-capped and precipitous, which lined the opposite shore, and towered, one above another, far inland—solemn and forbidding to look at. Heavy clouds lowered over the fjörðr, and clung to the mountains towards the sea. Huge masses of rock, torn off from the heights and hurled into the valley below, were lying all around us—awful witnesses of the fury of Arctic winters in these wind-swept regions—while hundreds of dead sea-fowl floated on the surf, and the whitened bones of whales and ponies were scattered along the beach. At the point where we then were, the fjörðr was about three miles broad; for we had come down a side valley, and had struck the fjörðr a considerable distance from its head. On the opposite side could be seen the farm of Reykja-nes, situated on a tongue of land running out into the water. The owner of that farm, we had been told, possessed a sea-worthy boat. Besides, he was the most likely man to know anything about Glámu; and it was our wish, if possible, to find him out.

Olavur returned with a loquacious old man, who examined us very minutely. He acknowledged that

his boat was rather leaky, and, what was worse, that he had no one to man it; but he told us that, at Hamar there was a good boat and plenty of men. Hamar was about two hours distant along the eastern shore of the fjörðr. We set off for it immediately. All our riding ponies had been left at Lági-dalr, for the grass was good there, and as our pack-horses were not so worn out as they, we were mounted on them; but the poor things could not travel very fast. The road, however, was very good—a shingly beach, with smooth grass above it, and, occasionally, small woods of scrub, in which we shot a few Ptarmigan. The country sloped back gradually to the mountains.

At Hamar we were most cordially welcomed by the farmer; a tall, dark man with black whiskers and a jolly expression of countenance. He ushered us into his house, and immediately ordered coffee. He recommended us to stop where we were that night, and the next morning, he said, if we rode on to A'rmúli, a farm about two hours off, we should there find a man who would direct us to the top of Dránga, and by the time that we returned from that expedition he promised to have a boat in readiness to take us wherever we wished. It was determined to follow his advice,

as already we felt ourselves to be considerably nearer the top of Dránga than we had expected to be for a long time to come. Our next thought was to find a place in which to pitch our little tent; and a patch of smooth grass was selected just above high-water mark. The lady of the house sent us out many good things, which she declared to be necessary for us.

About 10 o'clock the rain came down in torrents. Our tent was only five-feet-by-seven in dimensions, and we were three in number. It was close quarters, and we were without the proper appliances for defying the weather. Still, in spite of the blustering north-wester which howled around us, driving, at times, the rain and salt spray right through the canvass, and in spite of the roaring waves, which drew nearer and nearer with the rising tide—seeming as though they would vie with the stormy winds as to which should be the first to demolish our little dwelling—we laid ourselves down with light hearts in our small and fragile abode. Without, all was dim confusion; for the darkening elements made a night of their own: but within, our candle burnt brightly, and the little kettle sang sweetly over the spirit-lamp, as we talked over the fortunes of the journey. We determined, by hook or by crook, to reach the top of Dránga on the

morrow. We were in good condition, for the length of our wanderings had hardened us, and we felt ourselves equal to any amount of labour and fatigue. There was no fear of darkness, and physical force we hoped would accomplish the task. When we had extinguished the lights and composed ourselves for sleep, the storm seemed to increase in vehemence, and the piercing screams of affrighted sea-birds, startled us in our first slumbers.

Nevertheless, the next morning we found that all was calm. The sun was shining warmly, the wind had almost gone down, and the little there was came from the east. It was delightful, and we were soon ready for the start, but owing to the difficulty of finding our ponies (a common grievance in Iceland—they had strayed away in the night), it was impossible to start before half-past 8 A.M. We took with us our walking-boots, maps, barometers, and thermometers, two biscuits apiece, brandy-flasks, and some dry stockings for the ride home at night. And here I may mention, that dry stockings were a luxury we seldom enjoyed, except on Sundays.

We started along the water-side at a rapid pace, Olavur leading the way, driving before him two 'spare' ponies. He was soon out of sight; but we

knew, that if any difficulty presented itself on the way, we should find him by it. The road was along the shore. There was a wall of snow at the high-water mark, varying from four to nine feet in height; but the tide being low, we were able to ride between it and the water. From under this snow, there came numerous streams and small rivulets, that had been bridged over during the long winter. This wall continued for a long distance though in places there was smooth grass, affording us a good gallop.

The scene was very striking; close to us lay the blue waters of the fjörðr, sparkling with many sea-fowl; while in front, where the fjörðr bent away to the westward, the snow-streaked buttresses of Dránga stood up almost perpendicularly from the waters. But the view on the opposite shore was by far the grandest. A long row of mountain headlands rose up in echelon, stretching far out to the Arctic Ocean, dark, blue, huge, precipitous monsters, with the largest Stiga-hlíð, on the seaward flank, in shape like a vast pyramid with its apex cut off, and one side bent in. It was more than twenty-five miles away; and yet its outline was as clearly defined as if it had been no more than two.

Such a noble row of mountains was a rare sight. The sides of some of the nearer ones were traversed

by regular terraces like vine parallels, which continued all round their sea fronts, and far up into the country, till the view was intercepted by the next mountain. On one I counted seven of these parallels clearly and distinctly marked. The colour was most beautiful, something between indigo and blue, brightly illumined by the sun. Many of them were far too steep for snow, and (as I learnt afterwards from some of the natives) dangerous to be near in windy weather, owing to the incessant fall of rocks and stones from their sides and summits. With such a beautiful view our two hours' ride seemed but short. We then approached the bank of a broad and rapid river. Olavur and his horses were standing at the door of the farm-house of A'rmúli, on the opposite bank. He did not notice our approach; and I, deeming all was right, pursued the path into the water, and pushed my pony across the stream; but all was not right. A few steps, and the water was above my knees; another, and my pony was swimming. It did not take me a moment to assume a sort of half-crouch, half-kneeling posture on the saddle. I preferred that position (if it were possible to maintain it) to the proper one of throwing myself into the water on the stream side of my pony, and holding on by his mane, especially as the animal I was riding had a hog

mane. Happily, a few strokes further, and the pony was again on his legs; and soon after I jumped off, dripping certainly, but having, by this means, kept the upper part of my body dry. My companions, seeing my predicament, had wisely refrained from following me; and Olavur, having mounted and re-crossed the stream, led them through a shallower part. My map narrowly escaped a ducking, it being in my breast pocket.

At A'rmúli there were but two people—an old man and a small boy: the one too old, the other too young to be of any use to us on the Jökull. All the able-bodied were away in their boats fishing. The old man told us that the way by which we had wished to attempt the Jökull, namely, along the south shore of Kaldalón, was impracticable, owing to the swollen state of the Jökuls-à at its head. This was unwelcome news; but after much talking, we extracted from him that the only way to reach the top at the present time was, by going to a farm at the head of the Skjáldfannar-dalr, where a farmer lived who had actually been up to the Jökull once before. This was another two hours' ride, in a south-easterly direction. We hastened on.

This valley was like most others, but its torrent

was a rapid river; and there was also much more snow on the mountain sides than we had yet seen. A splendid eagle came in sight, but we were unable to get near enough to shoot it. At 12.30 we arrived at a point where the valley divided — one portion running in a northerly and the other in a southerly direction,—and at 1 o'clock we arrived at the farm we were in quest of. The owner, an active, middle-aged man, was at home, and agreed to come with us at once ; but, to our dismay, he told us there was another two hours' ride before we could begin to walk. It seemed as though we were haunted by two hours' rides. The only consolation was, that this must be the last of such rides, for our poor pack-ponies could carry us no further—they were already showing signs of fatigue. Here we put on our walking-boots and gaiters, and emptied our pockets of unnecessary things, leaving them in the farm-house till our return.

We left the farm at 1.30, and proceeded up the northern branch of the valley. After travelling a little distance, the farmer suggested that we should dismount, and catch four of his ponies, turning our own adrift to feed until we returned. This we did, and started at a good rate. No place could show the awful effects of the breaking up of an Icelandic winter more than the valley before us.

It was itself a deep ditch with mountain walls. Through the centre ran several broad glacier streams, white and rapid, intersecting one another in every possible manner and direction. Huge snow-drifts also climbed the mountain sides, and large masses of rock and earth lay strewn about, having descended from the heights above. One mass in particular drew our attention. We saw it long before we reached it, and thought it was a house in the distance. It had bounded into the centre of the valley, but was so strongly held together by the turf on it, that it remained unbroken, and presented the shape of an arch with a span of ten feet, and would almost admit of my walking under it. Our guide said it had fallen the previous week.

We proceeded up the valley, the waters increasing at every step ; the main river being a series of fearful rapids and falls. About half-past two, we were enveloped in mist and rain. Our guide thought it would be better to give up the attempt to mount the Jökull ; but we were determined to proceed. The ascent now was rapid, and the ponies clambered over the rocks in a marvellous manner. The valley had assumed the dimensions of a ravine, and the torrent was roaring beneath us between two walls of snow,

two or three hundred feet deep. At 3.15 our guide declared the ponies could go no farther, and we gladly dismounted, leaving them in the charge of Olavur. The barometer which stood at 29° at the sea level now marked 28° 27′. Our small barometer we left with Olavur, with instructions to move the pointer over the indicator exactly at 5 o'clock.

We began to walk at 3.25, taking an easterly direction across a steep snow-slope, into which we sank deeply. On leaving the snow the walking was very bad and stony.

Soon after, we descended again to cross the ravine which, by an unlucky bend, had come athwart our direction. The descent was not long, for a narrow snow-covered glacier, which ended abruptly in a precipice, filled up the ravine. It was about 100 yards across. The visible crevasses were very few.

At 4.40 we changed our direction to north-by-west, and at five o'clock the barometer marked 27°. Nothing was now to be seen. We were enveloped in mist, and seemed to be the centre of an ever-advancing circle of about forty yards in diameter. Latterly, our route had been more level; and, at 6.30, all upward progression ceased.

Our guide then declared that we were at the top.

This was very pleasant news, as it was very cold ; but we saw nothing. The barometer marked 26° 5′ ; thermometer 32°, and the wind was easterly.

While we were standing shivering, a fine mountain peak gradually loomed out through the mist in the east. This was Mið-munda-horn, the giant guardian of Reykjar-fjörðr. But though we could see the mountain in the distance, we could not distinguish things near to us ; the snow and mist seeming to amalgamate and to rise up like a wall. A few moments more and the mountain was again lost to us. We then endeavoured to warm ourselves, and learn a lesson of patient submission. Just as we were giving up all hopes of a view, the fog again broke up and gave us an extensive prospect. To the north we saw the Arctic Ocean, with a few, tiny white sails, probably French fishermen ; but the North Cape Horn was still shrouded in mist. To the south our view extended far, far away over vast and apparently endless snow-fields, which in part composed our old friend Steingríms-fjarðar-heiði. Some of the domes of Glámu, too, showed their white heads above the mists that clung to the mountain sides ; and on the southern shores of Ísa-fjörðr there were some wild and desert mountains, deep blue in colour; and just above them, in strange

contrast to all the misty whiteness of the surrounding objects, there hung some of the murkiest of murky clouds, streaked, on their under sides, with a dark orange colour. There was such an angry look about them, that it was quite a relief to look back on the regions of quiet, never-ending snow.

While we had been watching the gradual developement of the panorama, the mists had moved slowly away from us to the west, and we saw an extent of level snow before us in that direction. The summit of Dránga represents a round barrel of snow, and any cairn raised up on its back might be called the top. We were anxious to descend by the western side to examine the immense ice-fall which goes down into Kaldalón, but before we had proceeded far, heavy clouds of mist rolled over us from the east; and, as our guide was unwilling to accompany us, we relinquished our desire.

We descended the mountain by the same track by which we had ascended, keeping close together, as the fog grew denser than ever, and a heavy Scotch mist began to fall. It was 9.15 when we reached the ravine. We crossed the glacier just above its termination, which was almost perpendicular, and some hundred feet in depth. Looking down that gulf, for

it was not more than 100 yards in width, was an awful sight. The winding walls that enclosed the roaring waters, were perpendicular masses of snow. The glacier itself, at this point, was completely covered with snow; and if it had not been that our guide slipped into a small crevasse, and thereby revealed to us green masses of ice, we might have taken it for a snow-field. Once fairly off the snow, we descended rapidly, and reached our ponies at 9.45 P.M., having been absent six hours and a-half. Olavur's barometer had remained unaltered till five o'clock, marking 28° 30′ at 3.15 and at 5 o'clock. But it had now risen to 28° 38′.

We reached our guide's house at 11.45 P.M., where, owing to the torrents of rain that were falling, we rested an hour, and partook of some food. We were very hungry, having had nothing but two small biscuits apiece since 6 A.M. Our guide told us that once before he had ascended the Jökull with two Danes from I′sa-fjörðr. At 1.15 A.M., the rain still continuing, we left the farm. Our guide volunteered to pilot us across the river at once, by a much shallower ford than the raging one at A′rmúli. The road lay over a vast marsh, in which we made but slow progress, the ground being very soft. At

2.30 A.M. the opposite hills, the western boundary of the valley, were reached.

Our guide here alighted, and was on the point of leaving us to return home, when an idea struck him that we should like to visit an ancient battle-field hard by. It being now the 18th of June, we determined to visit it. We were soon obliged to dismount, the road becoming too boggy for riding safely. Having walked about a quarter of a mile into the marshy plain, we came to a perfectly smooth piece of gravelly ground, about 300 yards long, and from 20 to 50 yards wide. This we were told, was the battle-field, in which some thirty men from Melgrass-heiði encountered some other thirty men of the valley, and contended for a boundary line. It took place many hundred years ago; and the object of our guide was to pick up some of the bolts and iron arrow-tips which had been used on the occasion. These weapons turned out to be pieces of iron-pan, which had been formed round the roots of shrubs. If these were the weapons they used, the battle, judging from their number, must have lasted a considerable time. During the quarter of an hour we were there, we filled our pockets with them. The combatants had, certainly, shown great

judgment in their choice of ground; since, while all around was boggy and swampy in the extreme, this was as level and as firm as a cricket-field.

On regaining the ponies our guide bade us farewell; and we made the best of our way over the mountains to the shore of the fjörðr, reaching our tent, from which we had been absent about 22 hours, at 5.30 A.M. on the 18th. On our arrival I lost no time in releasing myself from my clothes, which, owing to the river having drenched me up to the waist, I had worn wet about me for twenty hours. In consequence of our successful ascent of the Dránga, we produced that morning, from our small stock, our richest viands, mock-turtle soup and other luxuries, such as Fortnum and Mason know best how to preserve. From our barometrical observations the height of Dránga would be about 2,924 feet. The height given in the map is 2,837 feet.

CHAPTER VII.

I'SA-FJÖRÐR.

Ísa-fjardar-djúp—A night on the water—Ísa-fjörðr town—The Club House—Mr. Clausen and the 'Metha'—Vigr—Eider-ducks.

In the afternoon we rose from our slumbers, and found that the farmer at Hamar had been true to his word, and a boat was in readiness for us. It was a small open boat. We packed into it all our luggage, and, leaving the ponies in charge of our friend at Hamar, pushed from the shore at 8.50 P.M. We steered our course for the town of I'sa-fjörðr, about 30 miles distant. The great fjörðr is called I'sa-fjardar-djùp, the head only of it being called I'sa-fjörðr, and from the west shore of this large fjörðr, there run up into the land several smaller ones, and at the head of Skutils-fjörðr, the most northern of them, the town of I'sa-fjörðr is situated.

We found it very cold, and our progress was slow;

but we were well repaid for the discomforts of the journey by the strange beauty of the scene. It was a dead calm. There was the silence as of dark night; for although there was a broad day light reposing under a leaden sky, all nature seemed asleep. The waters, as smooth as glass, were covered with innumerable sea-fowl. These lay like little logs upon the surface, each with its head beneath its wing, asleep. Every mountain, too, had put on its nightcap of mist, and all was hushed and quiet. We alone were restless. The splash of our oars was the only sound we heard, except occasionally a rumble from the mountains, either of falling rocks or snow. We saw the mighty ice fall pitching down from the heights of Dránga at the head of Kaldalón; and many a hideous fissure was visible through the hazy distance. In winter, we were told, the glacier actually flows into the waters of Kaldalón; but in spring the lower part either melts, or is swept away, by the rush of melting snow.

On our left we passed a black, cone-shaped mountain, standing as the guardian of two fjörðrs. The first of these fjorðrs we could see straight down for many a long mile, till it narrowed away to nothing. It had the appearance of a straight French canal, only it was hedged in on either side by unbroken ranges of

uniform, flat-topped mountains, instead of poplar trees. Down this canal was our intended route to Glámu Jökull, and it had not a very inviting appearance. About 1 A.M. (on the 19th June,) we were opposite the little island of Vigr, the favourite haunt of eider-ducks. It is but a little rock, a mile or so in circumference, but its grass was of the greenest, and it seemed to float upon the placid waters. On the summit of another mountain-head, we saw a huge block of stone, which seemed to be balanced almost on a point, and to all appearance the day of its humiliation could not be far distant. The melting snows had gradually washed away all the soil and grit around it, and I doubt not that the inhabitants of Vigr have already heard the thunder of its descent into the waters below.

Soon after 4 o'clock, we rounded the head-land at the mouth of Skutils-fjörðr. A little breeze springing up, a sail was hoisted, and we danced gaily into the harbour of Ísa-fjörðr, reaching it about 5.30 A.M., in spite of the worst of bad steering, accomplished by means of an oar on the leeward quarter. We staggered out of the boat as well as our cramped legs would carry us.

The Club House we soon found out. A ship was

painted over the door in imminent danger of a reef of rocks, on which stood a lighthouse, and underneath, in large letters, was seen 'Wedholm,' which we construed to mean 'The Ship' public house, kept by one Wedholm. On peeping through one of the windows, there was a table visible, a black bottle, sugar basin, tumblers and hot-water jug, evidently the remains of a carouse. This was a very cheering sight, and we rattled loudly at the door. Our appeal was answered by a very sleepy-looking man, in his night-dress, having a great profusion of short hair about his face. Olavur explained to him who and what we were, and he led the way into the very room containing the emblems of comfort we had seen through the window. He then retired to dress himself, and to stir up his household to prepare us food. Before very long, his wife and daughter appeared—the former a fine, matronly dame, evidently born and bred in the haunts of civilization, and clearly a stranger in the land: the latter, a charming girl with blue eyes.

After our hunger was appeased, we were shown into a little room adjoining the public room, the floor of which was covered with three beds. Thither we retired at 9 A.M. on the 19th.

Our landlord had been very talkative. Among

other things, he spoke about surturbrand (which is a wood in a fossil state), and told us that there were two sorts, one white, and the other black ; and that picture frames, and many other ornaments, were made of it. He told us also that there were beds of coal in the mountains, and that pieces of silver ore had been picked up.

We slept soundly till about 4 o'clock in the afternoon ; and when we next entered the public room, we found collected there seven or eight men of different descriptions, skippers, merchants, and such like. One of them, a Mr. Clausen, came forward, and addressed us in good English, and from him we received every possible attention. When I asked whether there was likely to be any ship that could take us to Akreyri (the chief town in the north-east of the island) in about a fortnight or three weeks, he at once offered us a passage in his own ship, the *Metha*, which he said would be leaving in about ten days' time, for the Skagafjörðr. We accepted this offer, considering that ten days would be a sufficient time for us to investigate the chief points of interest in that neighbourhood, which were the Eider Duck Islands, Stigahlíð, the mountain region of Surturbrand, and Glámu Jökull.

We were particularly anxious to obtain a sea passage on account of our ponies. The fatigues of the

journey, and the scanty food, had so reduced them, that Olavur declared them unable to carry us back, except by very slow stages. If now, we thought, a passage could be obtained in a ship of any sort for ourselves and luggage, Olavur and Bjarni might at once start off with the unladen animals, and drive them, by easy stages, to whatever part of the mainland the ship was going. On the other hand, if we were compelled to return by land, the journey out of the peninsula would be long and tedious, and would take nearly as many weeks as we should be days in the ship. Such considerations urged us immediately to send back Olavur and Bjarni to Lági-dalr, with orders to collect and forward to us, at I'sa-fjörðr, our heavy baggage, left in care of the boatmen, and then to drive the ponies round to Grafarós in Skaga-fjörðr, a distance of more than 200 miles, to which port the ship, *Metha*, was bound. We expected to reach Grafarós within three weeks.

Clausen then took us to view the *Metha*. She was a good, strong brigantine, with a captain and six hands on board. The cabin was clean, though not very large, and two or three thickset porter-bottles gave it an air of homely cheerfulness, that a whole

cellar of corn-brandy and schnap bottles would have failed to convey.

Clausen was travelling in behalf of his father's firm, whose head-quarters are in Copenhagen. They have three establishments in Iceland, and the *Metha* had come to replenish the warehouses, and Clausen, to see how things were going on. We next visited the warehouses belonging to the firm. The ground floor of one was all shop, stored with the wants of man and woman-kind; while two upper stories contained the same mixture of goods in reserve. The other warehouse was stored with wool. Wool is the great article of barter. The Icelander obtains all his luxuries in exchange for wool. The Danish merchants often refuse to give money for it, and the poor Icelander is obliged to take goods in exchange, and, under such circumstances, they are not always the best articles.

In the evening we started on a shooting expedition to a marshy place at the head of the fjörðr, whither Clausen was anxious we should go. We went by boat, receiving, as we passed the *Metha*, a small cargo of beer. Clausen had lived in England and cherished a great regard for our national drink.

Skutils-fjörðr is a small fjörðr, about five or six miles

long and one in width, and perpendicular mountains are walls to it on either side. Near to its head a narrow spit of land runs almost across it, forming a natural breakwater, and leaving but a narrow channel by the southern shore. On this spit of land the town of I'sa-fjörðr is situated. It is entirely composed of detached houses and shops, built of wood and pitched both inside and out. The whole appearance was clean and tidy, but a horrible smell prevailed. The church is a fine wooden building and stands a little way from the town on the narrowest part of the spit. It was undergoing repairs while we were there. From our boat we saw the whole town, in the shape of a crescent, hugging the shores of the bay. It was a beautiful night, calm and still, and the waters of the vast harbour we were crossing were without a ripple. There were five or six small vessels lying before the town, and the shadows of the dark mountains fell over all. The clearness with which distant objects could be seen was very remarkable. The sun had long since disappeared; yet objects far up the mountain sides seemed quite close to us. The shore to which we were steering appeared almost at hand, and yet it was nearly a mile distant.

The feathered inhabitants of the swampy places had

fled before we arrived, warned, no doubt, by the lusty voice of our host, who had favoured us with several songs. On our returning to the town, about 4 A.M., we commenced a furious onslaught upon some ravens. These birds had descended from their mountain fastnesses, where they sleep during the day, and were engaged in stealing the fish, which were hung out to dry on the shore. At 5 o'clock we retired to bed.

The next day Madame Wedholm and her daughter entertained us, while at breakfast, with some very pretty Icelandic songs, the young lady playing on the accordion. The plaintive airs were by far the best, the merry ones were too scrambling. In the afternoon we engaged a boat to take us to the island of Vigr, to see the colony of Eider-ducks located there. We had some difficulty in obtaining rowers, for the Icelandic race, as a rule, is averse to labour. We called at the *Metha* for Clausen, who was to accompany us. While we were on board, he suggested that we should invite a French merchant, who was in a ship then lying in the harbour, to come with us. We readily assented. We rowed alongside the French ship, and on the deck were duly presented to M. Bellenger of Dunkerque, a most agreeable-looking man, and polite beyond everything. He was

superintending the packing of some wool. Delighted at our proposal, he and his captain immediately prepared to accompany us. Thinking, I suppose, that the time would hang heavily upon us while they were adorning themselves, he very kindly sent us two bottles of champagne.

We started at 4.30 P.M., and a very merry party we were. The first three or four hours of the journey we were at liberty to shoot whatever we could approach, and the Frenchmen were thoroughly equipped with belts and bags of many descriptions. There were six guns in the boat, and wild fowl were plentiful. The eagerness of our friends was most dangerous, so much so that when the flocks were most numerous, we considered, much to the Frenchmen's amusement, prostration at the bottom of the boat the only safe place. Owing to detours to pick up wounded birds, our progress to Vigr was very slow, and we had only proceeded a mile or two up I'sa-fjardar-djúp, when it was agreed that we should land and pic-nic on the shore. It was midnight. We counted our bag, and found sixty-nine ducks, beside sea-fowl.

After supper, shooting was prohibited, as we were approaching Vigr, and Eider-ducks are nervous birds. They are protected by the law of Iceland, and the

destruction of one of them can be punished by a fine. In theory this may apply to eider-ducks all over Iceland, but it is only put in force, where the birds breed in large quantities; flocks are to be met with in all parts of Iceland's many-fjorded coast-line, in every creek and inlet, but of these no one seems to take any heed. The islands of Vigr and Œdey both in I'sa-ıjardar-djúp are their head-quarters in the north-west of Iceland; in these they live in undisturbed tranquillity. They have become almost domesticated and are found in vast multitudes, as the young remain and breed in the place of their birth. If they are persecuted, however, they soon regain their wild state, and would leave their home for some other more retired retreat; nor would they have far to go, for a new home could be found in every fjörðr.

We had now time and opportunity to look about us and enjoy the scenery. The general appearance of the fjörðr is not so grand to a person journeying up, as to one coming down; the mountain scenery not being so bold or so lofty at the head, as it is at the mouth of the fjörðr. There was a little rain on the journey, but before we reached Vigr, a neighbouring mountain had appropriated the cloud for its nightcap, and all was fair above. The wind was calm, and the

water quite smooth. As the island was approached, we could see flocks upon flocks of the sacred birds, and could hear their cooings at a great distance. At 3 A.M. we landed on a rocky, wave-worn shore against which the waters scarcely rippled, and, leaving the rowers in charge of the boat, set off to investigate the island. The shore was the most wonderful ornithological sight conceivable. The ducks and their nests were everywhere in a manner that was quite alarming. Great brown ducks sat upon their nests in masses and, at every step, started up from under our feet. It was with difficulty that we avoided treading on some of the nests. The shore only is thus infested. The interior of the island was covered with good grass; and we surprised a body of young maidens, who were engaged in hay-making. Frightened at our approach, they were hurrying away, when Clausen assured them that our visit was peaceable.

The island being but three-quarters of a mile in width the opposite, or southern shore, was soon reached. On the coast was a wall built of large stones, just above the high-water level, about three feet in height, and of considerable thickness. At the bottom, on both sides of it, alternate stones had been left out, so as to form a series of square compartments, for the

ducks to make their nests in. Almost every compartment was occupied; and, as we walked along the shore, a long line of ducks flew out, one after another. The surface of the water, also, was perfectly white with drakes, who welcomed their brown wives with loud and clamorous cooing. When we arrived at the farm-house, we found that the hay-makers had apprised their mistress of our approach. She gave us a cordial welcome. The house itself was a great marvel. The earthen walls that surrounded it, and the window embrasures, were occupied by ducks. On the ground, the house was fringed with ducks. On the turf slopes of the roof, we could see ducks; and a duck sat in the scraper.

A grassy bank, close by, had been cut into square patches like a chess-board (a square of turf, of about 18 inches, being removed and a hollow made,) and all were filled with ducks. A windmill was infested; and so were all the outhouses, mounds, rocks, and crevices. The ducks were everywhere. Many of them were so tame, that we could stroke them on their nests; and the good lady told us, that there was scarcely a duck on the island, which would not allow her to take its eggs without flight or fear. On entering the house, we were shown into a little room, whose furniture was very grand for Iceland. Four

maidens soon came in; each bearing a large bowl of milk. Each, in turn, approached the table, and taking a sip from her bowl, placed it before us. Our hostess told us that when she first became possessor of the island, the produce of down from the ducks was not more than 15 lbs. weight in the year; but, that under her careful nurture of twenty years, it had risen to nearly 100 lbs. annually. It requires about 1½ lbs. to make a coverlet for a single bed; and the down is worth from 12s. to 15s. per pound. Most of the eggs are taken and pickled for winter consumption; one or two only being left to hatch.

We apologised for our very early call; but our hostess declared herself highly pleased at having Englishmen and Frenchmen as her guests for the first time in her life. She was an elderly lady, and had married a young man, who was absent with his nets. The whole of the island was grass, of different qualities of goodness. Its surface was undulating, and its coast-line rocky, especially on the east, where it was bold and steep. We had a long row home again; and all took our turn at the oars. The Wedholms we found at breakfast; and, as our meals had neither been hearty nor many during the last twenty-four hours, we joined them, and, at 10 o'clock in the morning, went to bed.

CHAPTER VIII.

I'SA-FJÖRÐR.

I'sa-fjörðr—A horrible smell—Icelandic lady's ancient costume—Very annoying intelligence—I'sa-fjörðr sentinel—Stiga-hlíð—Ós—Midnight supper—Surturbrand—Departure.

In the evening, we walked out to the shore of the bay. There was quite a crowd on the beach, anxiously awaiting the approach of two boats that were dragging the ends of a large net. The first drag brought to light several waggon-loads of sea-weed, and some hundred halibut, flounders, and small cod. The excitement was very great when the boats came near the land. Everybody rushed into the water, and, seizing the fish, threw them high and dry upon the beach.

I have before mentioned that I'sa-fjörðr was infested by a horrible smell, that was present everywhere. We had observed, that it varied in intensity as we approached, or receded, from a certain black-looking building at the northern end of the town.

On investigating this building, we discovered that the seat of the smell was to be found in a mass of putrid sharks' livers, part of which were undergoing a process of stewing in a huge copper. It was a noisome, green mass, fearful to contemplate. The place was endurable only for a few seconds; yet dirty-looking men stirred up the mass with long poles, and seemed to enjoy the reeking vapours. We learnt, afterwards, that numerous small vessels were engaged all the summer in shark-fishing, and that the livers, and part of the entrails, were brought to I'sa-fjörðr to be stewed for the sake of the oil they contained.

On returning to the Club House, we found that Wedholm was giving a dance. We had hoped to have had a quiet evening; but, now, the house was in an uproar. Madame, her daughter, and two other females, were dancing the *trois-temps* most vigorously with four partners, and a sailor was playing the accordion. Our beds had been rolled up into a corner, and our sanctum was turned into a refreshment-room. Dancing and singing continued till 2.30 A.M., when, the ladies being exhausted, the gentlemen began card-playing; and we, taking advantage of the lull, went to bed. The next day being Sunday, we remained at I'sa-fjörðr.

In the afternoon, we visited Clausen's aunt, an old

lady who lived in the town. She had, very kindly, promised to dress herself in the ancient Icelandic costume for our especial benefit. The dress was black throughout. The skirt was ornamented round the bottom with a black velvet band, thickly embroidered with silver flowers. The bodice fitted tightly; and the sleeves were tight to the arm, with velvet cuffs. She wore a very high, white cap, towering over her head; and silver-gilt ornaments, of great size, were placed in every available position, of which the most conspicuous was a belt with immense clasps. A row of little buttons, hanging like bells, ornamented each sleeve, from the wrist to the elbow.

In the evening, we dined with M. Bellenger, on board the *Marie Louise.* He gave us a most sumptuous dinner, and we drank several international toasts. When we returned to the Club, all was still, Wedholm having promised that there should be no more balls till we were gone.

The next day, we had arranged to start for Stiga-hlíð, at 8 A.M. Wedholm disturbed us early in the morning, excusing himself by saying that the *Metha* was on the point of sailing, and that we must go on board as soon as possible. This was such an unexpected blow to all our plans that, at

first, we refused to believe the report. Clausen himself, however, soon came, and told us that, owing to commercial circumstances the ship must sail immediately. We expressed our surprise and regret as warmly as our position admitted. Our helplessness was complete. Our ponies had gone. There were no others to be bought, even if we had money enough to purchase them. There was no other ship in the harbour bound for the east of the island; and if we allowed the *Metha* to depart without us, we might have been imprisoned at I'sa-fjörðr for the rest of the summer.

Such being our helplessness we petitioned Clausen to delay the departure of the *Metha* for one day, in order that we might visit Stiga-hlíð. After a conference with his captain he agreed to our request, and we began the sorrowful task of packing up our boxes, that all might be in readiness for immediate embarkation on our return. There was great difficulty in procuring a boat and hands to man it, and the afternoon was far advanced before we left I'sa-fjörðr. The wind was in our favour, and we ran very quickly into I'sa-fjardar-djúp; but the wind then fell, and we had to take the oars. Our course was now directed to the base of the great Fjörðr, keeping

close under the huge mountain-walls of its western shore. These mountains were excessively grand. Such masses of perpendicular rock I had never before beheld. Although our sight became bewildered and our necks stiff with looking up, still there was something so impressively grand in their bold outlines that we were under a charm, and were constrained to keep our eyes fixed upon them. On the face of one of these rocky walls at a height, I should think, of more than 1,000 feet, there stands on a projecting knob a slender pinnacle, which is called the 'Ísa-fjörðr Sentinel.' Its light and elegant shape, as seen against the clear sky, contrasted well with the heavy form of its neighbours.

We toiled on till midnight, making but little way, for the wind was now ahead of us, and there was a heavy sea against us. We were only half-way to Stiga-hlíð; and it soon became evident that we should never be able to reach it and return in our allotted time. A merchant friend of Clausen's, who had accompanied us, suggested that we should land at the farm of Ós; and he volunteered to lead us to a spot in the mountains where surturbrand abounded. Accordingly, we landed at Os. There were several large fishing-boats lying off the mouth of the river, which,

coming down a mountain valley, there entered the fjörðr. From the great quantities of fish hung up and lying about on the rocky shore, Os was evidently a large fish-curing establishment.

The farm-house was distant about half-a-mile, at the base of a mountain on the southern side of the valley. In front of it the grass was very good and smooth, and continued so to the river's bank. The scenery before us was very pretty. Looking north over the river, we saw up the valley of Hóll, across a region of bare sand; and on the eastern side of it there stood a lofty pyramidical mountain, called Traðar-horn. Set, as it was, in the clear light of an Arctic midnight, it appeared as black as ebony. Turning to the west, we looked up at the valley of Ós, whose mountain boundaries were grand, and the outline of their long ridges was so sharp that they seemed only a few inches in thickness.

As no ponies were to be hired at Ós, we despatched a messenger to Hóll. In his absence, we borrowed a table and some benches from the farm-house, and removing them to the middle of the green-sward in front of the house, set out our supper. It was very cold; and if it had not been for a plentiful supply of beer, which the provident Clausen had ordered to be

placed in the boat, it would have been a very uncomfortable meal. The temperature was below freezing and a strong north wind was blowing. We were only twelve miles distant from the Arctic circle. Our messenger returned, driving before him a small troop of ponies which, on their arrival, were most refractory. They refused to be saddled, and broke away from us in every direction. One animal plunged into the river, and galloped back again to Hóll. We watched the pursuit, through our glasses, to the final capture at the farm-door. He was brought back and saddled in triumph. Our saddles were of the most primitive description. One was a species of pack-saddle, with all manner of uncomfortable hooks and pegs on its sides, and a bar of wood across the seat. Another had only one stirrup. Another was a sheep-skin, with two remarkably short stirrups. One of the party had no saddle at all.

Notwithstanding all impediments we galloped away up the valley of Ós, crossing the river by a shallow ford, and skirting a small lake, penetrated four or five miles into the valley. Then we ascended the hills on the north side, broken and rugged with frequent ravines and water-courses. On reaching the snow we dismounted and scrambled up a steep,

deeply-eaten torrent bed, where there was just sufficient room for us beside the raging waters. In a few minutes we came to a waterfall, and, by the side of the fall, to a small cave. This cave was cut into the surturbrand, and, to all appearance, had been formed by the natives hacking it out. The cave would scarcely admit of a person standing upright in it, and was about ten feet in depth. The surturbrand stuck out from the sides and back of the cave in thin laminæ, like slates. On the top of the cave, we found pieces of coal, or 'stien-coal,' as the natives call it.

The rocks around were of the kind of basalt which is commonly found in Iceland. Our watches, pointing to 3.30 A.M., warned us away; and we hurried back to our boat, and reached I'sa-fjörðr again at 8 A.M. The *Metha* was already in the roads awaiting us. The Wedholms parted from us with sorrow.

Our anchor was immediately weighed, and we departed. We stayed on deck till the mountains closed over the bad-smelling little town of I'sa-fjörðr, in which we had spent our time so pleasantly. With it, too, we left behind us the hopes of seeing much which we had toiled so hard to see. At Stiga-hlíð, we had been told that the strata of surturbrand could be

seen off the sea-shore, in long and regular lines. What we had seen was not the surturbrand of our imaginations. Glámu, too, we had never been near. One or two little journeys over the mountains, to the fjörðrs on the western shore of the peninsula, were also doomed to be unattempted. Sorrowfully, then, did we creep into the cupboards, called berths, on board the *Metha*.

CHAPTER IX.

SKAGA-FJÖRÐR.

The Sun at midnight—Skaga-fjörðr—Hofsós—Grafarós—A Poacher—Pepper and Mustard—Sailors ashore—Höfðavatn—Punch—Olavur's arrival with the Ponies.

LATE in the evening, we arose and went on deck; and our eyes were dazzled with the magnificent sight which presented itself. The ship was rolling about in a calm ocean-swell off the mountain-headland of Græna-hlíð, and the whole of the mountains on the western shore of I'sa-fjardar-djúp were lighted up by the most brilliant colours, from the rays of the declining sun. Stiga-hlíð's broad flank was a gorgeous red, while a patch or two of snow, on his highest ridge, were of the most lovely pink imaginable. A little way up the fjörðr there stood a mountain, whose purple sides seemed to be veiled in pink gauze; and further up still, deep purple mountains gradually faded into

ebony, while above them all, floated clouds of gorgeous colours, orange and yellow. It was, indeed, a wonderful sight. All the colours of the rainbow reposed on the scene. In a little while Stiga-hlíð retired into gloom, and his neighbour was crowned with glory. Thus the scene kept changing, and the beautiful colours flitted from mountain to mountain, losing none of their brightness, yet rendering the sight more charming by the constant change.

It was approaching midnight, and we turned to scan the northern horizon, hoping for an opportunity to see the sun at 12 o'clock. We watched, patiently, the heavy masses of cloud that hung along the horizon. There was an apparent yard of clear sky in the north, and above it the clouds were very black, and we feared lest it should be swallowed up before the sun's arrival. However, at 12.10, by our watches, the sun appeared in the horizon. He sat upon the waters for about five minutes, and then rapidly retreated again into the clouds, to resume his daily journey. The great hindrance to this sight on the northern shores of Iceland is the ice-fog, which usually drifts towards land in the night time. Luckily we were not favoured with its presence on that night, but it enveloped us for the next two days, during

which we saw nothing but the waves in our immediate vicinity, and immense flocks of Arctic sea-birds, which kept continually passing and re-passing the ship. Of the northern shore, with its mighty head-lands, we saw nothing.

Our progress was very slow. We fished with long lines, and caught immense halibut, weighing from 80 to 100 pounds. Their fins were the only good eating part about them. On the second day we were in great danger of a reef of rocks, towards which we had drifted in the fog. A boat was lowered, and an attempt was made to tow the ship to the sea. It was unavailing; but a gentle puff of wind saved us from shipwreck.

In the evening, the fog cleared, and we again saw the sun at midnight; but on this occasion, half of his face sank below the horizon, and a gorgeous path of glittering gold led from the ship's side to his half-submerged disc.

We were now off the mouth of the Skaga-fjörðr. The next day, a breeze sprang up, and we entered the fjörðr, and passing by the mountain island of Drángey, —the home of innumerable sea-birds,—the anchor was dropt off Hofsós, at 1 P.M. on the 27th of June.

A small schooner was lying in the harbour, and

the captain came on board the *Metha*. He was a very little man, dressed in the uniform of a merchant captain, and was evidently an old friend of Clausen's, whose friendship had doubtless been cemented by many meetings in these lonely parts. We went on shore immediately, fearing lest the rising gale should render a landing impossible. As it was, this was not effected without difficulty. There was no pier, jetty, or other means of landing, and large green waves roared and dashed upon the beach. The small boats were backed in through the breakers, and with long boots well pulled up, we stood in the stern, and, watching the opportunity of a retiring wave, stepped out and ran. Thus all came safe to land, with the exception of our saddles, which, being thrown to us from the boat, were caught in the waves but luckily not lost.

Hofsós is a merchant's establishment, and consists of two or three dwelling houses and several warehouses. These buildings are ranged round a sort of yard, and are all close to one another, and within a few yards of the beach. Clausen had no establishment here, but the *Metha* had some goods to discharge. Grafarós is a similar establishment, situated a mile or so higher up the fjörðr, and belongs to

Mr. Henderson of Glasgow. These two places are the market towns of a large tract of country, reaching all round the sides, and running far up into the interior of the island at the head of the Skaga-fjörðr.

Through the introduction of Clausen, we were most comfortably lodged in the house of the chief factor. The room allotted to us was nicely furnished, after the Danish fashion, with sofas, and chairs, and tables of different sizes, and having a large bed in a recess. There was also a small room upstairs at our disposal. Owing to the inclemency of the elements our baggage could not be sent on shore, and as Clausen was anxious before his departure to introduce us to one or two of the neighbouring inhabitants, we walked, accompanied by the little captain, to Grafarós, where we were introduced to Mr. Blondall, the agent of Mr. Henderson. He was a young man, well-mannered, and spoke the English language, having learnt it in Glasgow, which had been his residence for some time. After we had partaken of his hospitality, he procured ponies for us to pay a visit to an ancient Sysselman, who lived at Euni, a farm on the spur of the hills a few miles distant. The old man was delighted with our visit, and we stayed with him some little time, answering many

questions about European affairs, especially about Napoleon. To know what Napoleon was expected to do next, was a very common desire among Icelanders.

That night, or rather very early the next morning, Clausen bid us good-bye, and, mounting his pony, rode away. We thanked him for all his kindness to the utmost of our power; we could not have said more, even had we then known that his kind heart had ordered his captain to present us with a dozen of Bass before the *Metha* sailed. At 6 o'clock the next morning, we were busily engaged in removing our effects from the *Metha*, and it was no easy task as the sea was rough.

The region in which we now were was not very interesting. The view over the Skaga-fjörðr was pretty, and the island of Drángey was an interesting object, but the country around was boggy; and, inland to the east, a range of low brown hills was crowned with the ever-to-be-avoided heiði, and long bare valleys ran up among them. Such was the result of an observation from a neighbouring mound. Blondall however, who came to see us in the afternoon, told us that there were two excursions within a day's journey of Hofsós, which were well worth making. The one was to the mountain of Tindastóll, on the

opposite side of the fjörðr, and the other to the island of Drángey. But, unfortunately, the excursion was dependent in both cases on the state of the sea, and during the five days that we spent at Hofsós, a perverse north-east wind kept it in such a turmoil, that all attempts either to land on Drángey, or to cross the fjörðr in a little boat, would have been fool-hardy. In the region of Tindastóll, we heard that there were precious stones, probably opals, and also caves containing curious crystals.

In the evening two fishing smacks, driven by stress of weather, sought shelter in the fjörðr. The skippers came on shore, and we were astonished to find in them fellow-countrymen from the Thames. Their astonishment at seeing us was great, but still greater at being offered a glass of beer. They told us some long yarns about Rockall, which were not very complimentary to that fishing ground. It seemed almost incredible, but one of the men declared that, having been disappointed with Rockall, he had piloted his little smack to its present anchorage without a chart of any sort or kind. The same man knew Lowestoft, and showed his knowledge of the locality by mentioning the Gunton Woods as an object which he had often seen from the deck of his vessel. 'Do you know Gunton?' he was

then asked. His reply was, 'Many's the rabbit I've had out of them woods, and many's another I hopes to have.' This was rather amusing, as the father of one of our party was the owner of them. We were too far from home to treat him as a poacher, so the peace remained unbroken, and our friendship undisturbed.

The men, however, did us a good turn by offering to take letters to Shetland, whither they were bound, as soon as the wind permitted them, in order to discharge their cargoes of fish. I may add, that those letters reached their destinations in less than a fortnight. We learnt from these men that between twenty and thirty English fishing smacks yearly visit the northern and eastern coasts of Iceland. On the southern and western coasts, they said, the Frenchmen were too thick, and it was of no use to go there. We also learnt that they never attempted to pass Cape Nord, or to run down the western shore: they feared the Greenland ice. Although one of them had fished for five or six summers in these seas he had never discovered Ísa-fjörðr. When they have obtained a good cargo, they run to Shetland to discharge it, and return again for more. Their vessels were of about 40 or 50 tons burden.

A very curious dish was served up to us for dinner,

after our seafaring guests had gone. It consisted of roasted Petrels, Guillemots, and Razorbills, birds of a very oily and fishy nature. Some of their natural unsavouriness, however, had been cured by a good soaking in a pail of cold water. The oil had thus escaped, and their fishy qualities were diluted, and with the addition of cayenne pepper they were really palatable. I can earnestly recommend all persons travelling in countries where the art of cooking is still unknown, to carry with them a small bottle of this most excellent condiment. With it Fulmar Petrels can be eaten with a merry countenance, and the hospitable heart of a kind hostess need not be shocked by the grimaces which a dainty mess of putrid shark or mutton is wont to provoke.

Travellers would save themselves many a horrid gulp if they would but remember that 'it is all the seasoning that does it', and that there are many 'noble animals' that require its aid.

Cayenne, mustard and 'Chutney' should find a place in every well-appointed travelling trunk.

Sunday, June 29, we tried to spend in peace and quietness; but unfortunately the wind blew fiercer than ever, and several more smacks came in for shelter. The crews came on shore, and the emancipated

sailors amused themselves after their own hearts. A great desire for riding exercise seized them. They bartered away their knives, their tobacco-boxes, and even their jerseys, for a ride; others seized upon any animal they could lay their hands upon, and rode off full gallop, pursued by the owners.

Such being the state of Hofsós, we went out for a walk in the afternoon accompanied by Blondall, and turned our steps towards Höfða-vatn, a lake on the sea-shore at the mouth of the fjörðr. It was about four miles distant. This lake is curiously situated on a promontory running out into the fjörðr, on the two sides of which the waters of the lake are separated from those of the fjörðr only by a high shingle bank, while at the extremity there is a huge cliff, Porðar-hofði by name, which terminates on the fjörðr in a sheer precipice of three or four hundred feet. To reach this lake we walked through a swampy marsh, and in the pools and bogs found birds of many kinds, such as Red-throated Divers, Phaleropes, Dunlins, Snipe, Terns, and several sorts of gulls and ducks, and congratulated ourselves much on finding a hunting ground so near home, to which resort could be had if our other excursions proved impracticable. Having crossed the long shingle bank, we mounted the cliff at

the end. On a fine day the view from this point must be very charming, extending as it does over the fjörðr and its varied coast-line on the one side, and having the Arctic Ocean on the other. The cliff stands like a watch-tower and commands every way. But whatever the charm may be on a clear day, it was lost to us, for the day was thick and misty, and a terrific north-east wind almost blew us off our legs. Besides, it was dreadfully cold. We returned to Hofsós, and found the sailors returning from their ride and making a great noise.

On Monday we visited the swampy grounds around Höfða-vatn and returned with a basketful of eggs; some were very nice specimens, but there were none very rare. Having found out a sheltered nook behind some buildings, we manfully went through the disagreeable operation of egg-blowing. It is bad at all times; but when the sense of feeling is so benumbed that the operator is at a loss to know in which hand is the egg, and in which the blowpipe, it is wretched in the extreme.

There is a custom in Iceland, at least as far as our experience went, to intrust a guest or a traveller on his arrival at a house to the care of the eldest daughter, if there be one, if not, to the mistress herself; and she

waits upon him. Now the young lady at Hofsós, to whose lot we had fallen, was apparently of a remarkably silent disposition ; she was deaf to all questions and observations; we never heard her utter but one syllable, and that was on this very Monday night. After dinner, just as she was removing the remains of our Guillemots (we had Guillemots every day), she uttered the word 'punch.' At first, astonishment prevented us from arriving at her true meaning ; but when she repeated it in a whisper, the light of intelligence which shone in our countenances was answered by a smile. That night we had hot rum punch, and were a very great deal the better for it. The young lady never spoke again. To understand truly the comfort conveyed in the word 'punch,' let a man hear it after he has subjected himself for two or three days to a freezing wind, of sufficient violence to pass through all his clothes with the rapidity of a whirlwind.

July 1st.—The gale was still raging, and the smacks were still in the harbour, and the sailors on shore were more uproarious than ever. At every turn we met a 'jolly' tar whose equilibrium was unstable ; and the inhabitants clung to their ponies with the greatest tenacity. About midday we were cheered by the arrival of Olavur, who dashed into the yard at a

gallop, driving before him our troop of ponies. The poor creatures did not look much improved by their journey. Olavur himself was not in a very amiable mood, which I afterwards discovered was owing to the failure of his stock of snuff. He abused the roads of Iceland generally, declared they were all 'ecki god;' and we believed him. He had crossed and recrossed that wretched heiði to Kalmans-túnga and back in order to bring us our letters, which Gislason had kindly forwarded to that place from Reykja-vík. Good news from home was a great treat. In the evening it snowed hard, and the next morning mountains and hills were thickly covered, even almost to the water's edge; the wind howled and blew up great drifts, and the prospect was a very wintry one.

Having again the means of locomotion at our disposal, it was determined to push on to My'-vatn (Gnat Lake) with all possible speed. My'-vatn from the commencement of our journey had ever been present to our mind's eye, and it gradually came to be looked upon as a sort of happy hunting ground, to be our reward after our north-western wanderings had finished; a place where birds and fishes abounded, and round which many of the wonders of Iceland were concentrated.

It was with pleasure that we turned our steps towards it. Besides, My'-vatn was the high road to one of the main objects of our journey to Iceland, the vast tract of country called the Vatna Jökull—a yet unknown country. That the Vatna is surrounded by mountains of snow and ice is all that is yet known of it. What the interior may be is still a mystery: no foot has ever penetrated it, nor have any of its surrounding heights been scaled, so that the eye might range over its vast extent. It is still what it has ever been—an unknown land. It had from the beginning of our journey been our intention to descend upon this region from My'-vatn, and to attack it on its western extremity.

In the summer of 1861 I had, in company with Mr. Holland, endeavoured to peer into the interior from the summit of the Öræfa Jökull on the south side; but when within a stone's throw of the wished for sight we were robbed of our rightful reward by malicious mists. The proximity of the mountains on the southern side of the Vatna to the sea renders them more than ordinarily liable to fogs and mists. As we travelled along the southern shore it was very seldom that we saw the mountain summits clear for any length of time; if there was any southing in the wind at all, they were sure to be

enveloped in clouds. On this account we expected that the position of the Skaptár Jökull on the west would be more favourable. There was also another advantage possessed by this way of approach. It was on the route from My'-vatn to Hecla ; so that, in case of failure, the traveller would lose but little time. This latter fact was important, and our course was mainly guided by these reasons.

There is, however, one very great disadvantage under which this route labours, as we unhappily found, and that is, the almost total lack of herbage for ponies. What grass there is, is to be found only in the neighbourhood of a region of lakes called Fiski-vötn (Fish Lakes). It is at no season very luxuriant ; and in June, the time when the Jökull is most accessible, as the snow can then be easily traversed, it is certain that there is scarcely any. August is the month when the grass is at its best, but then, unfortunately, the walking over the snow is very laborious. Knowing all this we sought to reach Fiski-vötn by the middle of July, and thus, by striking a mean, to arrive at the most favourable period for the ascent.

As our ponies were rather jaded, it was thought advisable before we left Hofsós to purchase one or two more in order to strengthen our riding stud ; and

as the smacks were now endeavouring to get out of the fjörðr, the neighbouring inhabitants readily brought their ponies for inspection. A great many were brought, and we held quite a pony fair. This evening was spent very pleasantly with Blondall, but on returning, late at night, we found the house locked-up, and Olavur had to be squeezed through the window to open the door.

M & N. HANHART LITH.

CHAPTER X.

HOFSÓS TO MÝ-VATN.

Hólar—A Mountain pass—Vellir—A Postman—Akreyri—Lósa-vatn—Wild Goose chase—Goðа-foss—Mý-vatn—Midges.

THE next morning there was a very arduous packing and loading, and strapping to go through before we were ready to start. Our boxes and baggage had become sadly disarranged since they were last carried by ponies; still we left Hofsós at 11.20 A. M. This was on the 3rd of July:—Our first stage to Hólar was a short one; and having plenty of time for the journey, we called at Grafarós to bid good-bye to Blondall, and remained with him some hours, Olavur having gone on with the baggage. At 6 o'clock we followed. Blondall rode with us nearly all the way to Hólar. It was a pretty ride by the side of the fjörðr; the country was level and very green, and many farm-houses were dotted all around; our enemy,

too, the wind had sunk down, and a pleasant evening air had taken its place, so that even the heiði-crowned hills had an agreeable appearance. At Hólar, we were entertained by the pastor, a kind old man, who received us into his house, and treated us very hospitably. With him we were able to converse in Latin, not fluently, I admit; but each understood what the other intended to convey. He asked many questions about England, and spoke feelingly of the death of Prince Albert, whereupon I gave him a photograph of the Prince, with which he was much pleased.

The next morning we visited the ancient cathedral, and were instructed in the dates of the births and deaths of the bishops, who lie buried there. There were several dingy old pictures of some of them hanging against the walls. The cathedral is built of red-sandstone, and is a simple oblong building, having no side aisles. It is neatly kept, and very clean, and it possessed a good stone font.

We left Hólar at 12.45, and having retraced our steps of the previous day for a little distance, we then turned in an easterly direction. For a few miles our road led us through some pretty little valleys, formed by the uneven and irregular ground between the

higher hills. It there entered the Heljar-dalr, at the head of which was the pass over the mountains into the Svarfaðar-dalr, which valley runs down to the Eyja-fjörðr. We inquired of several farms, before a fylgðar-madr (local-guide) could be procured to accompany us over the pass. The ascent was very steep, and in places where the narrow path twisted about on the sides of the ravine, it was very dangerous owing to the loose state of the mountain sides. Our ponies were separated from each other to avoid the danger of an 'ugly rush,' which, under such circumstances, would have been very disastrous. On the higher regions of the pass the snow was deep, and there was much more of it than our guide had led us to expect. He, no doubt, had forgotten to allow for the effects of the late north-east gale. The ascending and descending took up an hour and three-quarters on the snow. When we had reached the summit of the pass, our eye ranged over the vast snow-fields, which covered Unadals Jökull with an unbroken shroud. The Jökull itself seemed but a little higher than the pass. The summit was about three miles distant. When entirely off the snow, our ponies were allowed twenty minutes to rest themselves. They had worked very hard for three or four hours.

Starting again at 7 P. M., we enjoyed a pleasant ride down the valley to Vellir, which was reached at 10.30. The valley itself was monotonous with uniform hills on either side, but the path was good, and the grass most luxuriant, and nothing delayed us, except a few tiresome bogs near the farm of Hòf, whose mud was of a dark orange colour. In these bogs one or two of our ponies, having been refractory in crossing the river and having separated themselves from their companions, were nearly swallowed up. They emerged completely painted, and were a pleasant contrast to the more sober colours of the rest. We crossed and recrossed the river several times. It was of considerable width, but of no dangerous depth. Our lodging at night in Vellir church—one of the better description of churches—was very cold, the thermometer marking 38° Fahr. with a rising wind; but we managed, by the help of the spirit-lamp and the whisky-keg, to coax a little warmth into our bodies, and then crept into our sleeping bags at 2 A. M.

The farm and church of Vellir are situated at the foot of the hills, on the eastern side of the mouth of the valley. From the church to the fjörðr there was a large tract of marshy land, through which the river flowed. On leaving Vellir, the road turned round the

hills to the east, till it reached the fjörðr, when it turned again to the south, and we rode along the shore. The path was some height above the water, and, at a little distance from it, cutting the sloping side of the great hills which line the fjörðr. We passed through some very soft bogs, and forded some impetuous rivers. A postman came in sight in a very intoxicated state. He turned his pony round, and accompanied us for some distance, till a stumble of his steed sent him off into a bog, where we left him declaring that he should soon be well again, if we would only give him a little schnaps. Olavur expressed an opinion that it was 'ecki god for the letters. A very pretty waterfall was passed, and we reached Horgà at 6 P.M. The pastor was a very animated young man, and we talked to him on various subjects in a mixture of all languages. His wife and another young lady were very agreeable, and we greatly enjoyed their hospitality. On leaving, the pastor kindly offered to pilot us across the river, which is broad and rapid, and rather dangerous. There were some fine tracts of hard grass-land near the river's mouth, over which we made rapid progress. As the fjörðr narrowed, the hills on either side increased in height and ruggedness, and our path was

forced down to the water's edge, and wound about among little bays and creeks. It was a pleasant evening; but we were not sorry to see the first suburban-looking house, which told that Akreyri was near at hand. It was then 10 o'clock; the Club House had ceased to exist, and it was with difficulty that shelter was found for the night. We would willingly have pitched our tent, but there was no patch of ground whereon to do so; everywhere it was either muddy, or hard and trodden. After some parley, two empty rooms were found, in a half-deserted house, and we slept on the floor, the new boards of which felt much harder than those of any church we had yet inhabited.

Akreyri is the second town in Iceland and shelters 600 inhabitants, yet no supper could be obtained at 11 P.M. Recourse was had to our reserve of potted meats. Sunday was cold and showery, and the town appeared deserted; yet it is but right to add, that of all Icelandic towns Akreyri is the most cheerful and most pleasant, as well as the most busy. It consists of a long straggling line of houses fronting the fjörðr and separated from the waters by a broad road and a narrow beach, and immediately behind the town the mountains rise up almost perpendicularly.

Every traveller is bound to admire the trees of Akreyri. There are only two of them, and they are not very large, but still they are trees; they have stems and branches of considerable thickness and are about twenty-five feet in height. They are mountain ashes, and stand before two houses at the northern end of the town. A large church was in course of erection, just behind our dwelling; it had a peculiar appearance being made entirely of white deal boards. The houses are painted various sober colours, stone colour, buff, or brown; black, however, is very common, being the result of tar. The window frames were generally white. There is a long jetty or landing place running out into the fjörðr and many boats and small smacks were around it. The fjörðr is about a mile broad, and the opposite range of mountains are more lofty than those behind the town.

We learnt that Mr. Gould had arrived at Akreyri on the previous day. We went to call upon our fellow-countryman and found him dwelling in clover, living in the house of one of the chief merchants, and waited upon by three of Iceland's fairest daughters, in one of whom I had the pleasure of recognising a former benefactress; for on one cold morning in September, 1861, as my friend Mr. Holland and I

were toiling up the snowy sides of Vaðla-heiði, she had enlivened that desolate spot with many a cheerful English air. Mr. Gould's room was carpeted, and one of the big trees overshadowed his window. The thought of our own state might have made us a little envious, for our house was a deserted one, our boards were bare, we waited upon ourselves, and the cold wind rushed in through the broken window.

The next morning we made several purchases and bought two more ponies, and engaged a carpenter to mend our boxes and other gear. In replenishing our stores we bought twenty-five new pony shoes. Leaving Akreyri at 2.30, we crossed the river at the head of the fjörðr. It was in a swollen state and, the tide being high, all its streams were deep. The path ascended the mountain-side in a steep zigzag; the ascent occupying about two hours. When on the summit we were in a perfectly clear atmosphere and looked down, not upon Akreyri and the fjörðr, but upon a dense mass of white clouds and mist, that had enveloped the opposite mountains and filled in the fjörðr. It was a most beautiful and curious sight. The bright sun shone upon a land filled as it were with mountains, valleys, and hills of the most varied and fantastic shapes, all as soft and white as wool. The

outlines of these unsubstantial shapes were sharp and well-defined, and there was no appearance of mist about them. No two forms blended one with the other; but as the clouds rolled on, each seemed to pass over or eclipse its neighbour. The eye ranged over this fairyland to a far distant horizon. Having descended into the Fnjóská-dalr we experienced some difficulty in fording the river which runs through it. It was deep and rapid. We rode down its bank for some distance, when luckily a native appeared, who pointed out to us a safe ford. Our road then lay through an Icelandic forest, one of the largest, as far as the trees are concerned, in Iceland, many of them being fifteen feet high or more. They were all birch trees, and the greater part of them what would here be properly called underwood. We soon reached Háls which is pleasantly situated on the spur of the mountains at the junction of two valleys. We took the one which runs in a south-easterly direction, and after skirting the margin of Ljósa-vatn (Clear Water), arrived at 10 o'clock at the church and farm which bear the name of the lake and are situated at a little distance from its southern extremity. It was a damp and cold night. Everybody was asleep; and we were forced to rouse the master before we could obtain the key of the church in which to lodge.

The view from the church-door, looking over the lake with its grassy borders and high mountain barriers, was very beautiful; but all the sounds of evening were drowned in the dull heavy roar of the waters of Goða-foss. The fall was about a mile and a-half distant; and on looking towards it, the white cloud of spray which canopied it could be plainly seen.

The next day we left the church-door at noon and rode down to Skjálfanda-fljót which, like the other rivers we had lately crossed, was in a swollen state. A little distance above the fall, a flock of wild geese were discovered upon the river. A volley from our guns disabled several of them, and as they were quickly borne down towards the falls a most exciting chase ensued. Bjarni and one of the natives, who had accompanied us, plunged into the stream, while we, following on the bank, urged on the chase with encouraging shouts. The ponies plunged and stumbled over the rocks, and getting out of their depths in holes were twisted round and round by the force of the stream: the native was pitched off, and his pony, seizing the opportunity, made for the land, whither, after several thumps on big rocks, he contrived to follow him. Bjarni managed better, and

succeeded in stopping two of the birds just before they reached the main current of the stream, or it would have been impossible to catch them. These birds, an old one and a young one, proved to be specimens of the Grey-lag Goose (*Anser ferus*).

It was not known before that this bird bred in Iceland.

This we regarded a piece of good luck ; one of the questions which we had hoped to decide during our tour, being how many species of geese there were which bred in Iceland. We had hoped to solve this question among the lakes of Arnar-vatns-heiði, but we were disappointed. It was now told us that large flocks of these birds bred near the sources of the Skjálfanda-fljót and of the Jökulsá i Axarfirði. Another breeding place was also mentioned on the northern coast east of the Eyja-fjörðr. Mr. Alfred Newton in a letter to the 'Ibis' (1864, p. 132) states that the Bean Goose (*Anser segetum*) and the Pink-footed Goose (*Anser brachyrhynchus*) have both been received from Iceland, and that eggs, of which the latter was said to be the mother, were sent with it. Should these birds breed in Iceland, then they will most likely be found in one of the above-mentioned places. As the nesting season is in the beginning of May, a time when the journey

from Reykja-vík to the north would be very difficult, the ornithologist who wishes to settle the question had better take ship in one of the merchant vessels that leave Copenhagen for Akreyri early in the year.

Goða-foss is a very satisfactory waterfall. It is not immense, but it is sufficiently large to be grand, and there are many good standing points from which the whole of its beauties can be taken in at a glance. Owing to the clear sky and bright sun, no less than to the plentiful supply of water, we saw it to great advantage. The waters fall into a large basin, and the shape of the falls is that of an irregular segment of a circle, which swerves greatly to the left bank of the river; so that a spectator on the left horn of the segment looking up the river, can see almost in front of him the main fall which is straight. This is separated from a horse-shoe fall by a huge rock which, if we may compare small things with great, might be called a Goat-island. There are also several smaller falls separated from one another by buttresses of rock; but these come into play only when there is a glut of water, and one was dry when we were there. They add greatly to the beauty of the whole, for the waters dash through them at different angles, and relieve the monotony of the steady downpour of the larger ones. The body of water

which was then being poured over the falls was very great, and the roar was deafening. Clouds of spray hung over them, in which the prismatic colours were very beautiful. The depth of the falls I should judge to be about 50 feet. Goða-foss was supposed to be the largest fall in Iceland; but Mr. Gould declares that it is not to be compared either in size or grandeur to the Detti-foss, which is a fall of the Jökulsà i Axarfirði, and which, from its out-of-the-way situation, had, till visited by Mr. Gould, escaped the curious eye of previous travellers.

After crossing the river we journeyed on to My'-vatn, over an undulating ground of bogs and heather and scrubby dwarf willow, passing on our way several parties of natives collecting Iceland moss. We gathered some ourselves, and found it tough and tasteless. About 7 o'clock in the evening, on surmounting a ridge, we came in sight of the lake of My'-vatn. The view was magnificent. Beneath us the Laxà (Salmon River), which flows out of the lake, was tearing along between grassy banks and blocks of lava; while the endless variety of land and water formed by the lake and its many curious islands was mapped out before us. There were dark streams of lava crawling over the country and disappearing into the water, and isolated

mountain peaks and masses, and strange hills of still stranger colours, and lingering patches of snow, and soft blue sheets of water, all combining to form a most extraordinary and bewitching scene. So interlaced were land and water, that it seemed as though the whole country was inundated.

Having missed the track we were a little lower down the river than was necessary, and we could see the farm-house by the ford of the Laxà about half-a-mile from us near the lake. On descending to it, we were immediately pounced upon by the chief inhabitants of the district, namely, the gnats, who rose up from the ground in clouds, and covered us completely, so that there was scarcely standing-room for another gnat either on man or beast, and a host of disappointed midges encircled the head of each one of us. These creatures were very small, but possessed great sucking powers. They had long shiny wings and were of a very bloodthirsty disposition, displaying great method and persistency in their mode of attack. No sooner had we dislodged those on our faces, than those on our collars and shoulders immediately occupied the vacant place, and the circle overhead contracted in an instant, descending upon us. Luckily, we were enabled, in some measure, to frustrate their designs by losing no

time in putting on veils. This pest was a very local one. The annoyance was felt only by the water's edge; but nowhere did we find them so numerous as on the banks of the Laxà, just at the place where it emerges from the lake. On two other occasions only did we meet with them in any great numbers during our stay at Mý-vatn. One was, rather unfortunately, when we were bathing in the lake. Having then so many undefended points, we waged a very unequal battle, and retired precipitately in a very disordered state farther inland. These creatures rose from the ground by the water's edge in a cloud; they danced about in the air for a minute or so, hardly ever rising more than five feet from the ground, and then settled, remaining on the ground two or three minutes at a time. They repeated this manœuvre over and over again. This was their mode of life.

The river bed being filled with lava and big stones was very difficult to ford, and one of our boxes was submerged, the pony that carried it having stumbled and fallen in the midst of the stream. From the Laxà to Reykja-hlíð the road runs by the shores of the lake, skirting the margin of the waters whenever it is practicable to do so. The shore is very irregular; deep bays and narrow creeks, fringed by smooth grass

and white sandy beaches, being separated by odd-shaped promontories from other bays and creeks. Hideously broken and distorted lava-streams stood erect on desert shores, marking the spot where the elements had met and fought a deadly fight. Time, with its mellowing moss and lichen, had not been able to efface the contortions of that fearful struggle. Some of the bays were very pretty, and all were covered with wild-fowl in incredible numbers. They kept well out of harm's way, but we enjoyed the sight. Yawning cracks in the grass occasionally revealed to us ancient lava-streams, which a long course of years had covered with soil and verdure. It was late when we reached Reykja-hlíð, and, being tired, we deferred pitching our tent till the following day, preferring to sleep in the lava-surrounded little church which stands close to the farm-house.

CHAPTER XI.

MÝ-VATN.

Reykja-hlíð—Sprengi-sandr—The Ducks at Mý-vatn—The Gadwall—Birds—Projects defeated—Sulphur Mountains—Obsidian Mountain—Vogar—Bad News—Return to Reykja-vík.

THE farm of Reykja-hlíð is situated at the north-eastern end of the lake, at the base of a low hill. Its front is towards the water, which is but a little distance off. The tún is small, comprising only a few acres, being the remnant that has escaped the lava-streams which, abounding here, have swallowed up almost everything. The house is clean, and much better than is usually met with, possessing windows that are not only made to open, but actually do open. We lived in our tent, taking our meals in the house, where excellent trout and char and ducks' eggs were served up to us without stint.

As our ponies had now before them some very long

stages with but little prospect of anything to eat, we determined to stay at Reykja-hlíð for a week, to recruit them thoroughly before they commenced their labours. Our plans were first to cross the Sprengi-sandr, a desert ride of 60 miles, to a place called Eyvindar-kofaver, where report said we should find some sort of herbage for the animals. Olavur argued the question very vehemently with everybody on the farm, it appearing to him very improbable that we should find grass there. We ourselves began to fear that Eyvindar-kofaver would differ from the surrounding desert only in having a name of its own. Should this prove to be the truth—and the continuance of cold weather, with storms of sleet and snow, rendered it only too probable—we should then have had to push on to the region of lakes before spoken of, called Fiski-vötn, about 12 miles further south. One thing was clear, that if the Skaptár-jökull was to be attempted from the west, it must be done from one or other of these two places. To transport hay for our numerous herd was impossible ; we hoped, however, to find sufficient food for them to subsist upon for two or three days, during which time we might explore something of the jökull, and perhaps peep over into the unknown land. From Fiski-vötn to Hecla, and

from thence to Reykja-vík by the Geysirs, was to be the finish of our wanderings.

Additional interest was added to this part of the journey by an idea, which everybody seemed more or less to entertain, that Skjáld-breíð, or some other volcano in the region of the Skaptár, was either just going, or had just gone off. Smoke, it was declared, had been seen on fine days in that direction, and indeed something was pointed out to us, but what that something was, was very doubtful, and it might very possibly be sand clouds. However, if there really was an irruption, we should be able to settle the doubt in a few days. Mr. Gould, who had joined us at Reykja-hlíð, had determined on forcing a passage through the long and unfrequented Vatna-jökull's-vegr, a road which seems to have been traversed about twice in the present century, and therefore he too would have an opportunity of discovering the real state of the case. To accomplish this dangerous journey, he intended leaving Möðru-dalr on the same day that we left Reykja-hlíð, and, if he succeeded in his enterprise, he was to join us again either at Eyvindar-kofaver or Fiski-vötn, which places we promised not to leave till a certain fixed time.

July 9 was a very miserable day, misty, rainy, and cold, but to such a state of things we had now become indifferent. Having procured a boat, we started to explore some of the many islands on which the ducks breed. The ducks of Mý-vatn are not all Eider-ducks, but a vast assemblage of ducks of many descriptions. They possess, however, some of the privileges of the Eider; they are very seldom shot at or disturbed by the natives, and their nests are never wholly robbed. Most of the farms situated on the shores of the lake have one or more of the islands belonging to them. The eggs collected from them are a valuable addition to their store of provisions. These ducks are not so tame, nor will they suffer their nests to be robbed so patiently, as the Eider. Unless four or five eggs are left in a nest they will not return to it. The first island we visited was a small one about 60 yards in circumference. It was flat and covered with long brown grass. I counted more than twenty nests on it. Only two species, the Scaup duck (*Fuligula marila*), and the Long-tail (*Harelda glacialis*), inhabited this island. Most of the birds left their nests as soon as the boat touched the shore, but a few remained and would not leave till driven away. We found two ducks—a

Scaup and a Long-tail—sitting on the same nest, which contained several eggs of both species. The eggs of these two kinds are very easily distinguished by a difference in colour, shape and size. The nests of the Long-tail were filled with down, which appeared but little inferior to that of the Eider.

The next island we visited was composed of broken lava, and was inhabited chiefly by the Red-breasted Merganser (*Mergus serrator*), and the Icelandic Golden-eye (*Clangula Islandica*). Both of these species breed in holes, and some of the nests were beyond our reach in the cracks and crevices of the lava. These species, we discovered, also lived together in the same familiar manner as the Scaup and the Long-tail. A Merganser was disturbed from her nest, in which there were four eggs which did not belong to her. The difference between the eggs of these two species is even more marked than that between those of the Scaup and Long-tail. The Black Scoter (*Oidemia nigra*) also breeds in the lava, but there was no great quantity of them, and being very shy birds, we seldom came near them. Having found a nest which we regarded as belonging to this species, we waited in ambush till the old bird returned, when, creeping stealthily up, we thrust a

landing-net over the hole, into which she immediately plunged. Being satisfied as to her identity, we liberated her and carried away her eggs. The landing-net proved very useful and was often employed. On some of the islands, the Red-necked Phalarope (*Phalaropus hyperboreus*), bred in great numbers. The young ones—tiny little pieces of animated wool—were very beautiful, and the old birds were so tame that they were caught in the landing-net like butterflies as they flew round us, and the hens sat still and brooded their little ones within a few feet of us. The Gadwall (*Anas strepera*), the Mallard (*Anas boschas*), and the Teal (*Anas crecca*), were unsociable birds, and their nests were in quiet swampy places on the shore of the lake, or on those islands which were not frequented by the vulgar herd. With these may be associated the Widgeon (*Anas Penelope*), the rarest of the inhabitants of Mý-vatn. Occasionally we saw one or two, but their antipathy to the human form was very great—perhaps it was owing to a winter sojourn in Great Britain. It is impossible to say in what numbers they exist at Mý-vatn. We only obtained one bird and nest; but at night their shrill whistle was heard at times above the general chorus of cooings and quackings.

The Pintail duck (*Anas acuta*) was seen in considerable numbers, but their nest was not so easily found—being solitary and placed at some distance from the lake—in those lava-streams which were overgrown with bushes and grass. But these birds, and several other species which we rarely met with, may occur in greater numbers on the southern and western shores of the lake, which we had no time to visit. The Harlequin duck (*Histrionicus torquatus*) confines itself to the Laxà, and breeds in holes on its banks. We met with this bird in great numbers in the N. W. Peninsula, but it was always on rapid streams and rivers. Our host was alive to all the different species, but we found him hopelessly involved in error with regard to the ducks and drakes. We gathered from him that there were five sorts of grey ducks, which were called the big grey, the middle grey, the little grey, the long-necked grey, and the red-grey duck, which represent the Mallard, the Widgeon, the Teal, the Pintail and the Gadwall. We could not conceive why the Gadwall was called the red-grey. We were told it was because the male bird had a red head ; this we denied, and the consequent explanations and arguments were endless. We enlisted Olavur on our side who, being a good debater, drove

the adversary at last to the self-consoling argument, that as he had lived among them all his life, he ought to know more about it than we did. The dispute turned upon whether the Widgeon or the Gadwall was the red-grey, and a female of the latter that we had shot was sadly mauled in the heat of argument. Our host maintained that the Gadwall was the red-grey and that the male possessed a red head; and he believes so still. The fact is that he having seldom seen the drakes with the ducks had imagined the male Widgeon to be the male Gadwall, and as the male Widgeon has a red head he called the female Gadwall, its supposed mate, the red grey duck (rauð-gra-and). As this mistake appeared to be general there, it may be useful to an ornithologist visiting Mý-vatn to bear it in mind.

My companion Mr. Fowler was fortunate in shooting a Gadwall as she rose from her nest. The doubt previously entertained of the nesting of this bird at Mý-vatn was thus satisfactorily removed.

We spent several days on the islands and shore of the lake, and enjoyed ourselves very much in spite of the unpropitious weather. Scarcely a day passed without snow or sleet, and the thermometer was as low as 31° Fahr. on the night of the 13th. Besides the numerous families of ducks, there are many other birds

in great abundance. The Sclavonian Grebe was found in every part of the lake, and Terns and Redshanks were very numerous. A ramble among the mountains was sure to disturb an Iceland Falcon, and Merlins were plentiful. Great Divers flew backwards and forwards far up over the lake, and Ptarmigan and Golden Plover could always be shot on the hills. Of the ducks the Scaup and Long-tail were the most abundant; and after them the others would come somewhat in the following order: the Icelandic Golden-eye, Merganser, Pintail, Mallard, Teal, Scoter, Harlequin, Gadwall, and Widgeon.

On the 11th, it had been arranged to make an excursion to Krafla and Námafjàll, or the Sulphur Mountain; but while we sat at breakfast the big snowflakes that danced merrily before the window-pane made us waver in our determination. Some natives arrived, and soon after Olavur came into the room and declared that the Sprengi-sandr was 'ecki god.' He then explained that the men who had just arrived had come from I'shólt—a farm situated on the borders of the desert—and had told him that the farmer at I'shólt had returned from an unsuccessful attempt to cross the Sprengi-sandr, that, owing to the snow and wet weather, it would take at least

three days to cross it, and that food for the animals must be carried along with us for that time. This was very discouraging intelligence indeed; but, considering the weather which we had experienced for the last month, it was not much more than might have been expected. However, being fully determined to know the exact state of the desert, we despatched our youth, Bjarni, to I'shólt to make inquiries, and also to penetrate into it and satisfy himself of its condition. We felt sure that if it was practicable Bjarni would find it out and tell us, for he was a youth of great energy and pluck and, moreover, he was particularly anxious to cross the Sprengi-sandr. To have crossed the Sprengi-sandr with a party of travellers would have been to him the taking of a degree, and he would at once have had a place among Icelandic guides. On hearing of this deplorable state of the Sprengi-sandr, Mr. Gould gave up the idea of the Vatna-jökulls-vegr, and there being many spots of saga renown which he was anxious to visit, he left us for Akreyri. We brooded long over the untoward news we had received, and thought ourselves the most unfortunate of men. Should we be unable to visit the Skaptár, there was nothing left for us but to return to Akreyri, and, giving up our long-cherished hopes, pursue the usual route to Reykja-vík.

In the afternoon the weather cleared up, and we rode to the Sulphur Mountains on the east of the lake, These large hills are a very wonderful sight. They are of various colours, a variety of mixtures of red and yellow. From their sides are emitted numerous jets of steam, and masses of bright yellow sulphur are strewed all around them. At the foot, on the eastern side, are the mud geysirs—huge cauldrons of blue mud in different stages of solution. Some bubble and spurt like filthy water ; others are so gross that they can scarcely heave the massive bubbles to the surface. They are the centres of broken and dilapidated cones raised by their own sputterings. The highest part of these cones, which was that part towards the mountains, was about three feet. They are, however, continually changing in shape ; and I observed that the positions of the cones themselves was different from what they were when I visited them in 1861. All around the soil was very treacherous, consisting of hot mud, with a covering of sulphur about an inch in thickness, which in most places was sufficiently strong to bear a man's weight. When this crust was broken, steam issued forth strongly impregnated with sulphur. The clouds of steam, the roaring, the spluttering, and the splashing of

these loathsome pits, the sickening smell and the desolate country, had somewhat of an awe-inspiring effect.

On leaving this fearful place we rode to Krafla, a well-known volcano situated a few miles to the north of Náma-fjáll, whose irruptions in years past have, in a great measure, produced the desolations of the Mý-vatn district. Our ascent to the crater was prevented by the snow again descending in a heavy storm. We then turned aside to the Obsidian mountain, Hrafn-tinnu-hryggr, whose ragged sides were shining with their jet-like covering. This mountain is a long ridge of no great height, adjoining the volcano. Instead of the usual covering of stones and rocks, it is covered with pieces of obsidian of all shapes and sizes, whose shining polished surfaces had a very peculiar effect, which has truly been likened to a mass of broken wine bottles. The thin edges of many of the smaller pieces are very sharp, and require to be handled with caution. At the foot, on the eastern side, there were some huge blocks of this substance. I carried away a small one weighing 42 lbs. It was an awkward addition, certainly, to my personal luggage; but I contrived to carry it on my saddle-bow. At Akreyri I packed it in a box, and left it to the mercy of the captain of any ship that

might be leaving that town for England. About six months after my return home, it arrived safely.

During Bjarni's absence Jon Jonson the proprietor of the farm of Vogar, a short distance from Reykjahlíð, paid us a visit, and invited us to go and see him. Vogar is a small oasis in the lava, on the shores of the lake, and in its sheltered garden there were cabbages and potatoes growing with some vigour. He had taught himself English from one or two books which he possessed, but he had no idea of an English sound. He spoke English with an Icelandic pronunciation, and we had some very amusing conversations with him. He told us that he was dissatisfied with his country, for it was 'too coldish.' He was the only Icelander I saw who possessed a fiddle. He could play a little; but the strings were broken and he was unable to replace them. He showed us a short description of Mý-vatn, and the surrounding mountains, which he had written in English. Its style was rather peculiar. He gave me his MS. hoping that I would correct it and return it to him; but, sad to say, it was lost before I reached Reykja-vík.

On the night of the 13th, Bjarni returned and confirmed the report we had heard. On the day that we had despatched him, he had ridden to Í'shólt. The next

day he had hired a pony, and ridden several hours into the Sprengi-sandr, accompanied by the farmer, who declared to him that it was then in a worse state than when he had attempted it in the previous week. He reported the road to be not so bad as many we had traversed; but it was so bad that we should only be able to proceed at a walking pace, which with our retinue would, as was before said, be a three days' journey. He suggested that the baggage train should be left behind; but to this we objected on account of the tent, and the idea of taking three riding ponies apiece and riding on continually, till we reached the hut at Fiski-vötn, could not be entertained. He heard also that some men from the other side of the pass, who yearly cross over it at the earliest possible time to attend to some farms that they possess in the north, had not yet come over, though they were nearly a month beyond their usual time. And again, at Myri he heard that so long as snow was seen on Blá-fjall, which was now covered, the Sprengi-sandr was impassable. Such was the character of the long string of news which he had picked up.

We were long in doubt what to do, being unwilling to bring the second part of our journey to an unsuccessful issue; but the difficulties were so many, and

the distress which our poor ponies would have to undergo so great, that after many tossings to and fro we most reluctantly gave up the hopes, that we had so long entertained, of visiting the Skaptár. We therefore gave orders to Olavur to part with the unnecessary stores, and left Reykja-hlíð at 7 o'clock in the evening of the 14th, retracing, in some little vexation, our steps to Akreyri.

From Akreyri to Reykja-vík we followed the usual route which has been so often described. Our old friend, Arnar-vatns-heiði, we found in a much sounder condition than when we had last seen him, and our ponies galloped over his stony surface with apparent comfort. On reaching Thing-vallir we turned aside for a few days to visit the Geysirs. The big one was surly and would only go off in the middle of the night; but a system of watches which we instituted generally collected us all from our sleeping-bags at the first signal-gun, and we gathered round the crater, clad in strange garments which ought never to have seen the light. Strokr, of course, was teased; and one emetic which we gave him was so large that for some time we feared that we had killed him outright by an overdose, but at last he vomited forth with redoubled fury.

At Thing vallir, we met 'Umbra' with his accompanying shades, gliding through the land. One of them blew a horn as we passed.

Reykja-vík was reached on the 29th of July, just three months from our first arrival in the island.

Our stud was put up to public auction: the first pony brought to the hammer was, after much competition, knocked down to the highest bidder at 10*s.* 3*d.*, the others fetched somewhat higher prices; and thus ended an expedition, not wholly successful, yet not without its reward.

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